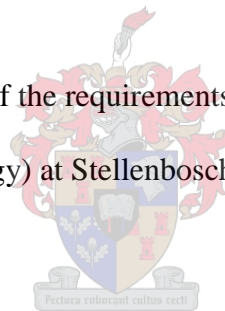


**BEST FRIEND NOMINATIONS AND PEER STATUS AMONGST
PRESCHOOLERS: A SOUTH AFRICAN STUDY**

By

Philippa Megan Haw

Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
(Psychology) at Stellenbosch University



Supervisor: Prof H. Loxton

Co-supervisor: Dr H. Swart

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Department of Psychology

March 2017

DECLARATION

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

March 2017

Copyright © 2017 Stellenbosch University

All rights reserved

ABSTRACT

Friendships are important to preschoolers' mental, emotional and physical well-being, and contribute to their social and cognitive development (Denham & Brown, 2010; Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003; Halle & Darling-Churchill, 2016; Louw & Louw, 2014). Despite this, studies on friendships amongst preschoolers in South Africa are scarce. Moreover, South African studies regarding best friendships amongst preschoolers are largely non-existent. In light of the importance of friendship to development, and to address the gap in literature, this study aims to provide a better understanding of best friendships amongst preschoolers within a South African context.

The study explored two research questions based on archival data obtained by means of semi-structured interviews with 58 preschoolers, 34 girls and 24 boys (aged 4 to 6 years), who comprised two class groups, namely Pre-Grade R (N = 32) and Grade R (N = 26). Content analysis was used to analyse the archival data. The first research question looked at which factors influenced preschoolers' nominations as a best friend. Five best friend nomination themes were found in light of this, namely *Personal characteristics and psychological attributes* (37.44%); *Play and shared activities* (32.51%); *Geographical associations* (11.33%); *Similarity amongst preschoolers* (11.33%), and *General fondness* (7.39%). Of the 14 best friend nomination sub-themes identified, the most prominent was *Socially positive traits and behaviour* (27.09%). Significant differences in the frequency of responses for the themes and sub-themes according to gender and class group were also addressed. While there were no differences between the class groups, significant differences were found for gender, particularly for the *Geographical associations* ($p = .003$) theme and *Propinquity* ($p = .001$) sub-theme, where boys nominated peers as best friends according to these significantly more than girls, and for the *Socially positive traits and behaviour* ($p = .003$) sub-theme, where girls nominated peers as best friends according to this sub-theme significantly more than boys.

The second research question asked whether there were any distinguishing characteristics between preschoolers who received more peer nominations (high peer status preschoolers) and those who received fewer peer nominations (low peer status preschoolers). No significant differences between the peer status groups were found in terms of the frequency of responses for the themes. There was, however, a significant difference in the frequency of responses for the sub-theme *General play* ($p = .041$) where low peer status preschoolers were nominated as best friends according to *General play* significantly more than high peer status preschoolers. Notable differences in the content of the best friend nomination sub-theme *Socially positive traits and behaviour* were found between the peer status groups. High peer status preschoolers were found to display a wider repertoire of prosocial traits and behaviour than low peer status preschoolers. This study therefore provides a better understanding of best friendships and peer status amongst preschoolers within the South African context.

OPSOMMING

Vriendskappe is belangrik vir die geestelike, emosionele en fisieke welsyn van voorskoolse kinders en dra by tot hul sosiale en kognitiewe ontwikkeling (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003). Desnieteenstaande is studies oor vriendskappe tussen voorskoolse kinders in Suid-Afrika skaars. Feitlik geen Suid-Afrikaanse studies oor beste vriendskappe tussen voorskoolse kinders is nog gedoen nie. Inaggenome die belangrikheid van vriendskap vir ontwikkeling en om die leemte in die literatuur aan te vul, het hierdie studie ten doel om 'n beter begrip te skep van beste vriendskappe tussen voorskoolse kinders in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks.

Die studie het op grond van argiefdata twee navorsingsvrae ondersoek. Die data is verkry deur middel van semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude met 58 voorskoolse kinders – 34 meisies en 24 seuns tussen 4 en 6 jaar oud – in twee klasgroepe, voorgraad R (N = 32) en graad R (N = 26). Inhoudanalise is gebruik om die argiefdata te ontleed. Die eerste navorsingsvraag het die faktore wat voorskoolse kinders se benoemings as beste vriend beïnvloed het, ondersoek. Vyf temas vir die benoeming van 'n beste vriend het na vore gekom. *Persoonlike eienskappe en sielkundige kenmerke* (37.44%); *Spel en gedeelde aktiwiteite* (32.51%); *Geografiese assosiasies* (11.33%); *Ooreenkomste tussen voorskoolse kinders* (11.33%) en *Algemene toegeneentheid* (7.39%). Van die 14 subtemas vir die benoeming van beste vriend wat geïdentifiseer is, was *Sosiaal positiewe trekke en gedrag* (27.09%) die belangrikste.

Beduidende verskille in die frekwensie van response vir die temas en subtemas volgens geslag en klasgroep is ook ondersoek. Geen verskille tussen klasgroepe het na vore gekom nie. Beduidende verskille vir geslag is wel gevind. Seuns het beduidend meer as meisies portuurs as beste vriende benoem volgens die tema *Geografiese assosiasies* ($p = .003$) en die subtema *Naburigheid* ($p = .001$). Meisies het weer beduidend meer as seuns portuurs as beste vriende benoem volgens die subtema *Sosiaal positiewe trekke en gedrag* ($p = .001$).

Die tweede navorsingsvraag het gehandel oor of daar enige onderskeidende eienskappe was tussen voorskoolse kinders wat meer portuurbenoemings gekry het (hoë portuurstatus) en dié wat minder portuurbenoemings gekry het (lae portuurstatus). Die frekwensie van response volgens die temas het geen beduidende verskille tussen die portuurstatusgroepe ontbloom nie. 'n Beduidende verskil in die frekwensie van response volgens die subtema *Algemene spel* ($p = .041$) het egter na vore gekom. Op grond van *Algemene spel* is voorskoolse kinders met 'n lae portuurstatus beduidend meer as dié met 'n hoë portuurstatus as beste vriende benoem. Merkbare verskille in die inhoud van die subtema *Sosiaal positiewe trekke en gedrag* is tussen die twee portuurstatusgroepe gevind. Voorskoolse kinders met 'n hoë portuurstatus het 'n wyer spektrum van prososiale trekke en gedrag getoon. Hierdie studie verskaf dus 'n beter begrip van beste vriendskappe en portuurstatus onder voorskoolse kinders in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to the following people:

- Prof Helene Loxton, my supervisor. Thank you for the time and effort you dedicated to assisting me in completing my thesis. I truly appreciate your valuable knowledge, insights, passion and the ongoing support. It has been a privilege working with you.
- Dr Hermann Swart, my co-supervisor. Thank you for your guidance, support and enthusiasm throughout this process. Thank you for always being willing to help.
- I would like to express my gratitude to the principal and coordinator of the preprimary, preschool and daycare facility for welcoming me into their school, and for allowing me to conduct my research on the archival data obtained at their school. I appreciate your warmth and enthusiasm towards the study.
- To the preschoolers' parents, thank you for allowing your children to participate in the study. This study would not have been possible without your consent and support.
- To the preschoolers, thank you for your enthusiastic participation in my research and for your valuable contributions. It is greatly appreciated.
- To Therese Beharrie for assisting me with the language editing of my thesis.
- Lastly, to my friends and family, thank you for your continuous encouragement and great interest in my research throughout this process. A special mention to Oliver Allen for your relentless support and care.

DEDICATIONS

This research is dedicated to my parents, Laurence and Colleen Haw. Thank you for your endless support, enthusiasm and encouragement throughout my education. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to pursue my academic aspirations and for believing in me. Your love and care are most appreciated and valued.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
OPSOMMING	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
DEDICATIONS.....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	viii
LIST OF TABLES	xiv
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE.....	1
1.1. Introduction.....	1
1.2. Key terminology	4
1.2.1. Friendship amongst preschoolers.	4
1.2.2. Preschoolers' friendship nominations.	5
1.2.3. Peer status amongst preschoolers.	6
1.2.4. Preschoolers within the South African context.	7
1.3. Motivation for the study.....	9
1.4. Aims and objectives	11
1.5. Outline of thesis	11
1.6. Chapter summary	12
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	13
2.1. Introduction.....	13

2.2. The concept of best friends amongst preschoolers	13
2.3. Factors influencing friendship nominations.....	17
2.3.1. Preschoolers' socially positive traits and behaviour.	18
2.3.2. Preschoolers' physical attractiveness.	22
2.3.3. Preschoolers' play and shared activities.....	23
2.3.4. Propinquity amongst preschoolers.	26
2.3.5. Similarity amongst preschoolers.	27
2.4. Preschoolers and peer status	33
2.5. Chapter summary	37
CHAPTER 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	38
3.1. Introduction.....	38
3.2. Contextualising the developmental stage of preschoolers	38
3.3. Contextual perspective: Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory	39
3.4. Social perspective	43
3.4.1. Bowlby's theory of attachment.	43
3.4.2. Allport's intergroup conflict theory.	44
3.5. Developmental theories	46
3.5.1. Bandura's social learning theory.....	46
3.5.2. Piaget's cognitive developmental theory.	47
3.5.3. Erikson's psychosocial developmental theory.	51
3.6. Chapter summary	53

CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	54
4.1. Introduction.....	54
4.2. Research design	54
4.3. Qualitative measures.....	55
4.4. Participants.....	56
4.5. Procedure	58
4.6. Data analysis	59
4.7. Trustworthiness.....	62
4.8. Ethical considerations and procedures.....	63
4.9. Chapter summary	64
CHAPTER 5 RESULTS	65
5.1. Introduction.....	65
5.2. Demographic characteristics of the sample	66
5.3. Best friend nomination themes and sub-themes	66
5.3.1. Best friend nomination theme rank orders.	67
5.3.2. Best friend nomination sub-theme rank orders.	68
5.3.3. Content of best friend nomination themes and sub-themes.	71
5.3.3.1. Theme One: Personal characteristics and psychological attributes.....	71
5.3.3.2. Theme Two: Play and shared activities.....	76
5.3.3.3. Theme Three: Geographical associations.....	80
5.3.3.4. Theme Four: Similarity amongst preschoolers.....	82

5.3.3.5. Theme Five: General fondness.	85
5.3.4. Differences in the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes according to gender.	86
5.3.4.1. Differences in the best friend nomination themes according to gender.	86
5.3.4.2. Differences in the best friend nomination sub-themes according to gender.	88
5.3.5. Differences in the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes between class groups.	90
5.3.5.1. Differences in the best friend nomination themes between class groups.	90
5.3.5.2. Differences in the best friend nomination sub-themes between class groups.	91
5.4. Peer status amongst preschoolers.....	93
5.4.1. Differences in the best friend nomination themes between peer status groups.	94
5.4.2. Differences in the best friend nomination sub-themes between peer status groups...	95
5.4.3. Differences in the best friend nomination sub-theme content between peer status groups.	97
5.5. Chapter summary	98
CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION	99
6.1. Introduction to discussion of results	99
6.2. Best friend nomination themes and sub-themes	99
6.2.1. Theme One: Personal characteristics and psychological attributes.	100
6.2.2. Theme Two: Play and shared activities.....	106
6.2.3. Theme Three: Geographical associations.	113

6.2.4. Theme Four: Similarity amongst preschoolers.	118
6.2.5. Theme Five: General fondness.....	123
6.3. Differences in the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes according to gender	123
6.3.1. Differences in the best friend nomination themes according to gender.	124
6.3.2. Differences in the best friend nomination sub-themes according to gender.	124
6.4. Differences in the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes between class groups	127
6.4.1. Differences in the best friend nomination themes between class groups.....	127
6.4.2. Differences in the best friend nomination sub-themes between class groups.....	128
6.5. Peer status amongst preschoolers.....	129
6.5.1. Differences in the best friend nomination themes between peer status groups.	130
6.5.2. Differences in the best friend nomination sub-themes between peer status groups.	130
6.5.3. Differences in the best friend nomination sub-theme content between peer status groups.	135
6.6. Chapter summary	137
CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	138
7.1. Main findings of the study	138
7.1.1. Factors that influenced preschoolers' nominations as a best friend.....	138
7.1.2. Distinguishing characteristics amongst preschoolers based on peer status.....	139
7.2. Critical review of the study.....	140
7.2.1. Limitations of the study.	140

7.2.2. Valuable aspects of the study.....	140
7.3. Recommendations.....	142
7.4. Concluding remarks	143
REFERENCES	144
APPENDICES	167
Appendix A: Child Psychology 778: Honours Community Interaction Project Questionnaire: Example of English version.....	167
Appendix B: Preliminary institutional permission	168
Appendix C: Approval of research by ethics committee	169
Appendix D: Information letter to parents/guardians	171
Appendix E: Informed consent form for parents/guardians	173

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 <i>Demographic Characteristics of the Sample of Preschoolers (N=58)</i>	57
Table 2 <i>Frequency of Responses (f) for Best Friend Nomination Themes and Theme Rank Orders for the Total Sample (N = 58)</i>	67
Table 3 <i>Frequency of Responses (f) for Best Friend Nomination Sub-themes and Sub-theme Rank Orders for the Total Sample (N = 58)</i>	69
Table 4 <i>Comparison of the Frequency of Responses (f) for Best Friend Nomination Themes and Theme Rank Orders According to Gender</i>	87
Table 5 <i>Comparison of the Frequency of Responses (f) for Best Friend Nomination Sub-themes and Sub-theme Rank Orders According to Gender</i>	89
Table 6 <i>Comparison of the Frequency of Responses (f) for Best Friend Nomination Themes and Theme Rank Orders According to Class Group</i>	91
Table 7 <i>Comparison of the Frequency of Responses (f) for Best Friend Nomination Sub-themes and Sub-theme Rank Orders According to Class Group</i>	92
Table 8 <i>Comparison of the Frequency of Responses (f) for Best Friend Nomination Themes and Theme Rank Orders According to Peer Status</i>	94
Table 9 <i>Comparison of the Frequency of Responses (f) for Best Friend Nomination Sub-themes and Sub-theme Rank Orders According to Peer Status</i>	96

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Chapter 1 presents a general introduction to the present study, the key terminology used and the motivation for the study. Thereafter, the research aims and objectives are stated. An outline of the thesis is presented at the end of this chapter.

1.1. Introduction

Friendships are one of the principal ingredients of individuals' lives from as early as the age of 2 to 3 (Kehily & Swann, 2003). Although children as young as this are able to interact with others, the preschool peer group (ages 4 to 6) is presumed to be one of the earliest formal organisations of children within which enriching friendships can be cultivated (Sachkova, 2014). Friendships may contribute positively to an individual's mental, emotional and physical well-being, their social and cognitive development, as well as aid in the establishment of personal competence, self-worth and identity (Denham & Brown, 2010; Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003; Halle & Darling-Churchill, 2016; Louw & Louw, 2014; Poulin & Chan, 2010).

Many researchers such as Gifford-Smith and Brownell (2003) have declared the formation of friendships at the preschool age to be particularly important to development. In terms of social development, positive peer relationships are believed to offer preschoolers the opportunity to develop pivotal skills, values and attitudes (Katz & Galbraith, 2006). They may develop collaborative and prosocial behaviours such as sharing, as well as establish enduring patterns of relating to others (Bateman, 2012; Sebanc, 2003). In friendships, preschoolers gain competencies such as loyalty, empathy and perspective-taking, which are thought to provide a fundamental base for developing successful future relationships (Bateman, 2012; Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996). Preschoolers are believed to acquire an understanding of others' thoughts and

feelings through friendship, and, as they develop this social understanding, they may learn how to respond to others in an appropriate manner (Louw & Louw, 2014).

In terms of emotional development, preschool friendships may instigate growth. Preschoolers may learn how to express and manage their emotions (Denham, 2006), may learn self-regulation, and gain an understanding of the consequences of their own internal states and expressiveness (Denham & Brown, 2010; Halle & Darling-Churchill, 2016). In friendships, preschoolers are likely to learn the connections between emotions and behaviour by means of attaining an understanding of why peers behave the way they do (Denham & Brown, 2010). This is tied to the development of theory of mind, which refers to “a set of opinions constructed by a child (and adult) to explain other people’s ideas, beliefs, desires and behaviour” (Louw & Louw, 2014, p. 164). This may lead to preschoolers’ understandings of how to predict peers’ behaviour based on their growing knowledge of mental states, as well as that others have perspectives that may differ from their own (Halle & Darling-Churchill, 2016). These understandings are thought to contribute positively to the quality of their relationships as they may be better able to relate to and comprehend others (Halle & Darling-Churchill, 2016).

Preschool friendships have also been linked to promoting language, cognitive and physical development through play. According to Louw and Louw (2014), preschoolers practise communication skills through conversation during play. This is thought to enhance the development of preschoolers’ unfolding literacy skills, which can support their academic achievement (Louw & Louw, 2014). As the central means of interaction amongst preschool friends, play is thought to encourage preschoolers’ cognitive development through, for example, the exercising of visual-spatial skills (Louw & Louw, 2014). In addition, play encompasses activities such as skipping or running, known as “functional play”, which has been suggested to stimulate gross and fine motor development tied to physical development (Louw & Louw, 2014, p. 210). Constructive play, where children use objects to creatively

construct something, is also believed to promote cognitive development by encouraging preschoolers' problem-solving endeavours (Hartup, 1992; Louw & Louw, 2014). Moreover, play that involves make-believe (commonly referred to as "fantasy play"), may encourage preschoolers to exercise their cognitive and perspective-taking abilities, as well as their communication skills (Louw & Louw, 2014, p. 210).

In light of the important role preschool friendships play in development, the present study aimed to investigate the factors that influence preschoolers' nominations as a best friend. In this way, the study aimed to identify those aspects that facilitate friendship formation amongst preschoolers. Findings from this study may inform the development of interventions that are designed to promote friendship formation amongst preschoolers, thereby supporting their holistic development.

The total number of "best friend" and "other friend" peer nominations received by each preschooler was calculated, with the purpose of determining each preschooler's peer status. The preschoolers were subsequently grouped into two peer status categories, namely high peer status and low peer status (Sachkova, 2014), and any distinguishing characteristics among preschoolers with regard to these statuses were explored. This assisted in identifying the characteristics of preschoolers with the largest number of friends (those who could be considered as most popular), thus those characteristics that could be considered as most successful in establishing friendships. These findings may further support the development of interventions designed to cultivate those characteristics in preschoolers thought to be attractive to peers. Most importantly, the present study was the first to investigate best friend nominations and peer status amongst preschoolers within a South African context and could therefore be considered as novel.

1.2. Key terminology

In this section, the key terminology used in the study is defined.

1.2.1. Friendship amongst preschoolers.

Friendship typically involves positive regard characterised by affection or a friendly feeling (Walker, Curren, & Jones, 2016). It has been regarded as an intentional interdependence between two individuals, with the purpose of fulfilling their social-emotional goals, and comprises different intensities of companionship, closeness and mutual assistance (Hays, as cited in Walker et al., 2016). The relationship can be characterised by a joint history, and recognition by the two individuals involved that it has a unique status, which makes it different to an acquaintanceship (Mendelson, Aboud, & Lanthier, 1994).

While studies to date have investigated friendships amongst preschoolers, few studies such as Sebanc, Kearns, Hernandez, and Galvin (2007) have explored *best* friendships amongst preschoolers. According to research on best friendships in middle and late childhood such as Quinn and Hennessy (2010), best friendship is a specific form of friendship that appears to be more positive and influential than other friendships. It is thought to involve greater support, companionship and exclusivity (Quinn & Hennessy, 2010). In the present study, the term “best friend” is operationalised as a peer who a preschooler likes the most out of all peers in their peer group. In light of the small knowledge base on best friendships amongst preschoolers, this study will include literature on friendships amongst preschoolers.

Friendship is regarded as being central to a good life as it contributes to subjective well-being (Walker et al., 2016). It provides the satisfaction of the psychological need for relatedness and contributes to individuals’ competence and autonomy (Walker et al., 2016). Hartup, as cited in Sebanc (2003), proposes four functions of friendship for personal development:

1. They support the learning and development of new skills;

2. They encourage self-awareness, as well as awareness of others and the world;
3. They provide emotional and cognitive support for both ordinary and more emotionally difficult interactions, and
4. They form the basis of future relationships.

By the age of 4, most children appear to be involved in at least one close friendship (Hartup, 1992). Children of the preschool age (4 to 6 years) typically articulate friendship as involving those peers with whom they play or who live nearby, define their friendships in terms of physical attributes, and refer to them in the here and now (Selman, 1980). Recent studies such as Ogelman and Secer (2012) and Sebanc et al. (2007) have found that preschoolers may define friendship in terms of prosocial behaviour. Ogelman and Secer (2012), who performed a quantitative study on the choices of friendship among 96 5- to 6-year-old preschoolers in Turkey, found that prosocial behaviour was the dominant predictor of their friend selections. In a South African field study conducted by Exenberger (2003), the friendship choices of preschoolers from two multi-racial preschools, one located in South Africa and one in London, were examined. The study found that preschoolers' friendship choices could be summarised by the category prosocial behaviour.

These findings are interesting in light of early literature, for example, Bigelow and La Gaipa (1980) and Selman (1980), which postulates that children largely from the age of 7 manifest the cognitive abilities necessary to identify, define and understand friendship in terms of affective, motivational and prosocial intentions.

1.2.2. Preschoolers' friendship nominations.

According to Vu and Locke (2014), preschoolers tend to show clear preferences in their choices of play companions and are capable of articulating this. Studies have provided evidence for this by means of employing the friendship nomination procedure, in which children are

asked to verbally identify their best friends during an interview (see Eivers, Brendgen, Vitaro, & Borge, 2012; Rekalidou & Petrogiannis, 2012; Shin, Kim, Goetz, & Vaughn, 2014). This procedure is regarded as one of the most successful measures to be used with preschool aged children (see Eivers et al., 2012; Rekalidou & Petrogiannis, 2012; Shin et al., 2014). It is suggested to add an important subjective dimension to understanding early friendships and can facilitate the young child's developmental capacity to report their own ideas, opinions and experiences (Eivers et al., 2012).

Preschoolers' choice of friends seems to be based on an emotionally positive peer assessment associated with fondness (Sachkova, 2014). A variety of factors may play a role in shaping the decision to nominate a peer as a friend. According to literature, the following factors are prominent: preschoolers' socially positive traits and behaviour (Ogelman & Secer, 2012); preschoolers' physical attractiveness (Seban, 2003); preschoolers' play and shared activities (Furman & Bierman, 1983); preschoolers' geographical associations (Selman, 1980), and similarity amongst preschoolers' attributions and behavioural tendencies, tastes and interests, as well as physical appearance and demographic variables including gender, race and ethnicity (DeRosier, Kupersmidt, & Patterson, 1994; Deutz, Lansu, & Cillessen, 2015; Exenberger, 2003; Fawcett & Markson, 2010; Rekalidou & Petrogiannis, 2012; Sanefuji, 2013). The factors that may influence preschoolers' friend nominations are further discussed in Chapter 2.

1.2.3. Peer status amongst preschoolers.

The term 'peer status' (also referred to as 'popularity' or 'peer acceptance' by Coie et al., as cited in Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004, p. 570) typically defines the extent to which children are liked or disliked by the peer group (Asher & McDonald, 2009; LaFontana & Cillessen, 2002). It is believed to be an indicator of peer acceptance, companionship and the peer group's

combined perceptions of an individual child (Betts, Rotenberg, Trueman, & Stiller, 2012; Hymel, Vaillancourt, McDougall, & Renshaw, 2002).

In the present study, the term ‘peer status’ is operationalised as the degree to which preschoolers are reported to be liked by the peer group. Due to ethical reasons, the researcher did not explore peer status in terms of the degree to which preschoolers were disliked. Preschoolers’ peer status was calculated by means of counting the number of peer nominations received by each preschooler. The researcher employed a point system, whereby each “best friend” nomination a preschooler received counted two points, and an “other friend” nomination counted one point. A total “all friend” score was calculated for each preschooler by adding the preschooler’s best friend and other friend scores. This score was then used as the preschooler’s peer status score, which placed them into two peer status groups, namely a high peer status group or a low peer status group. Preschoolers who obtained a peer status score of 5 and higher were categorised as the high peer status group ($N = 42$), and those who obtained a peer status score of between 0 and 4 were categorised as the low peer status group ($N = 30$). This will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

1.2.4. Preschoolers within the South African context.

The term ‘preschoolers’ within the present context refers to children aged between 4 and 6 years. Children these ages typically occupy the preschool period which is referred to as the foundation schooling period that prepares children for primary education (Louw & Louw, 2014). The preschoolers involved in the present study constituted two class groups, namely Pre-Grade R and Grade R. Pre-Grade R included preschoolers aged 4 years to 4 years and 11 months ($N = 32$), and Grade R included preschoolers aged 5 years to 5 years and 11 months ($N = 26$) in accordance with the South African preschool system.

Preschoolers are considered to be among society's most vulnerable members and are reliant on parents, families, educational facilitators as well as the state to be protected from harmful experiences (UNICEF, 2007). According to UNICEF (2007), children should have the right to survival, to advance to their fullest potential, to be sheltered from detrimental experiences including violence and poverty, as well as to be involved in all aspects of life. The South African Constitution suggests that young children's needs and development are central priorities. According to Statistics South Africa (2015) the mid-year population estimates in 2015 show that approximately 11 million children are between the ages of 0 and 9. This means that a significant proportion of South Africa's population are between these ages. It is thus considered important to invest in the welfare of young children (SAHRC & UNICEF, 2011).

However, despite the efforts made to protect the young population, South Africa still faces issues such as poverty, corruption, violence, poor health facilities and deteriorated living conditions, which may disrupt children's health, psychological well-being, social development and scholastic achievement (Cook & Cook, as cited in Louw & Louw, 2014). This may manifest in numerous negative outcomes for them. For example, a South African study conducted by Barbarin, Richter, and De Wet (2001) examined the effects of exposure to political, family and community violence on the adjustment of 625 South African 6-year-olds. The study found that exposure to violence contributed to attention difficulties and aggression, as well as caused symptoms of anxiety and depression in these children (Barbarin et al., 2001).

In addition, South African preschoolers may be vulnerable to the aftereffects of Apartheid. Influenced by older generations, these children may adopt discriminatory attitudes towards racially diverse Others, which may distort their potential to develop friendships with diverse peers (Finchilescu, Tredoux, Mynhardt, Pillay, & Muianga, 2007; Sinclair, Dunn, & Lowery, 2005). The potential for the development of cross-racial friendships in the present study was high as the preschoolers at the preprimary, preschool and daycare facility of interest

represented a variety of races and cultures in South Africa. The diversity was represented by children from three major ethnic groups in the Western Cape, namely the White, Coloured and Black communities. In South Africa, the terms ‘Coloured’ and ‘Black’ are controversial. This study does not use these terms in a discriminatory way. They are used to differentiate between racially diverse communities that reside as a consequence of South Africa’s political history (Howard, Muris, Loxton, & Wege, 2016).

1.3. Motivation for the study

As preschool friendships largely contribute to children’s development (Denham & Brown, 2010; Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003; Halle & Darling-Churchill, 2016; Louw & Louw, 2014), a study identifying factors that influence preschoolers’ nominations as a best friend and facilitate preschool friendships has substantial developmental value. To date, no studies have investigated these factors in a South African context. Moreover, no South African studies have explored peer status amongst preschoolers. Findings from this study may support the development of interventions which aim to encourage the formation of friendships amongst preschoolers within a South African context, while promoting their holistic development.

In addition to being important to preschoolers’ current development, the ability to establish friendships during the preschool years has been suggested to predict individuals’ psychological adjustment as adults and the success of their future relationships (Johnson, Ironsmith, Snow, & Poteat, 2000). The formation of friendships at the preschool age may allow individuals to develop and practise social skills and competencies such as perspective-taking that are important to the development and maintenance of relationships throughout life (Bateman, 2012; Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996). The present study aimed to explore friendships amongst preschoolers within the South African context specifically. The topic of relationships within the South African context is particularly sensitive as South Africa manifests a long history of intergroup discrimination stemming from Apartheid (Finchilescu et al., 2007).

Literature shows that preschoolers may, as a result, adopt long-standing discriminatory attitudes that may distort their capacity to develop healthy relationships with dissimilar Others throughout their lives (Finchilescu et al., 2007; Sinclair et al., 2005). If this generation can be encouraged to develop fruitful relationships despite difference, it can positively contribute to South Africa's struggle with intergroup conflict, manifesting in both present and long-term impacts for the individual and for society.

Most international studies on friendship formation focus on homogenous groups of preschoolers and thus disregard the experience of preschoolers with, for example, diverse ethnic and language backgrounds (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006; Howes et al., 2011). In light of Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979) ecological systems theory, preschoolers, shaped by a unique constellation of social and environmental factors, may come to define friendship in dissimilar ways. It is therefore important to consider population diversity. The present study adds value in terms of this by including preschoolers with diverse ethnic and language backgrounds.

Few studies within a South African context such as Loxton (2009) have allowed the voices of preschoolers to be heard through child-friendly, individual semi-structured interviews. This study thus adds value by recognising preschoolers' developmental capacity to report on their own experiences, which adds an important subjective dimension to understanding early friendships (Eivers et al., 2012; Loxton, 2009). The present study is scientifically relevant and adds value to the existing knowledge base on friendships amongst preschoolers within the South African context. It addresses a gap in international and South African literature regarding best friendships amongst preschoolers, and is socially relevant in terms of the contributions it can offer in understanding the processes that underlie the development of these friendships.

1.4. Aims and objectives

The present study had two primary aims:

- To identify the factors that influenced preschoolers' nominations as a best friend amongst a sample of preschoolers (aged 4 to 6) from a preprimary, preschool and daycare facility in Stellenbosch in the Western Cape Province of South Africa, and
- To investigate whether there were any distinguishing characteristics amongst preschoolers receiving more peer nominations (high peer status preschoolers) compared to those receiving fewer peer nominations (low peer status preschoolers).

1.5. Outline of thesis

Chapter 1 introduces the background to the research problem of the present study. To provide clarity, key terms such as 'friendship amongst preschoolers'; 'preschoolers' friendship nominations'; 'peer status amongst preschoolers'; and 'preschoolers within the South African context' are defined, and the motivation for the study is highlighted. Thereafter, the primary aims and objectives of the research are briefly stated. Chapter 2 presents relevant and noteworthy past research on preschoolers' friendships and the factors that may influence preschoolers' friendship nominations. It also reviews literature on the concept of peer status amongst preschoolers.

A discussion of the theoretical framework for this study will take place in Chapter 3. This discussion will contextualise the developmental stage of preschoolers, and present diverse perspectives on child development to provide the reader with adequate background. Chapter 4 addresses the research methodology of the study, including the research design, the participants, the measuring instruments used, the research procedures employed to collect the

data and to conduct the analyses, as well as the ethical considerations and procedures pertaining to the study. The results rendered in this study will be explored in Chapter 5, and will be visually presented via tables as well as discussed qualitatively. A discussion of these findings in relation to prior research will be presented in Chapter 6. A conclusion to the study will follow in Chapter 7, and will include the critical overview of the study, as well as recommendations for future research.

1.6. Chapter summary

Chapter 1 has oriented the reader by means of a general introduction and statement of the research problem. The key terminology and relevant concepts were defined. Thereafter, a motivation for the study and a brief overview of the aims and objectives of the research were given. Chapter 1 concluded with a description of the thesis outline and a summary of the chapter. A literature review of past studies performed on preschoolers' friendships, preschoolers' friendship nominations, and peer status amongst them will now follow in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a review of literature concerning friendships amongst preschoolers, aged 4 to 6 years. This includes literature regarding the concept of best friends amongst preschoolers, the factors found to influence preschoolers' friendship nominations, as well as literature concerning the concept of peer status amongst preschoolers.

2.2. The concept of best friends amongst preschoolers

Research regarding children's social development has, for many centuries, doubted the capacity of preschoolers to develop stable and identifiable friendships (Mannarino, 1995). However, more recent observations have found that even toddlers show preferences for certain peers, can establish stable friendship networks, and can partake in diverse kinds of behaviour with preferred versus non-preferred peers (Hay & Cook, 2007; Lindsey, 2002).

Throughout development, the conceptions of friendship are thought to undergo distinct qualitative changes, transforming in systematic ways as children grow older (Poulin & Chan, 2010). This view is embraced by developmental theorists such as Piaget, who posit that there are distinct stages in the development of friendship and that each stage represents a fundamental reorganisation of children's understandings (Kehily & Swann, 2003). The pattern of change for school-aged children and adolescents has undergone extensive research; however, limited information regarding the development of friendship conceptions amongst preschoolers exists (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2007).

According to Kehily and Swann (2003), the limitation of studying young children's relationships is that they are not capable of sharing ideas about their friends. This understanding fuels the gap in friendship literature. It is believed that only older children are able to share

their ideas about friendship (Kehily & Swann, 2003). Moreover, the void in friendship literature may be the result of early theorists' beliefs that friendships are less important in early childhood (Sullivan, 1953). Preschoolers were understood to view friends as temporary playmates, and only in middle childhood were children thought to have authentic understandings of friendship (Sullivan, 1953). Consequently, the nature of preschoolers' friendships appears to be less well-known (Lindsey, 2002; Sebanc, 2003). However, modern studies have shown that preschoolers manifest more advanced, in-depth conceptions of friendship than what was initially theorised (Sebanc, 2003). Sebanc (2003) postulates that preschoolers' friendships seem to be related to social behaviour and status in ways similar to studies involving older children, and concludes that their friendships appear to be comparable.

Growing interest in this field of study has concerned the lack of information regarding preschoolers' best friendships, and the patterns of attraction that lead preschoolers to select another as a best friend (Cleary, Ray, LoBello, & Zachar, 2002). This is of particular interest because of the influence of best friendships in other childhood periods. For example, best friendships in middle and late childhood appear to be more positive and influential than other friendships (Quinn & Hennessy, 2010). They involve greater support, companionship and exclusivity, and are regarded as an important area of investigation (Quinn & Hennessy, 2010). This study therefore aims to address a gap in friendship literature by investigating best friendships amongst preschoolers.

For many years, literature has stated that preschoolers' conceptions of friendship are based purely on observable attributes such as physical characteristics, propinquity and shared play (Furman & Bierman, 1983; Sachkova, 2014). Preschoolers have been found to explain best friendship on the grounds of interactions in the here-and-now, and tend to emphasise shared pretence, time spent together, common pursuits, success in activities, and the enjoyment of identical games (Dunn & Hughes, 2001; McDougall & Hymel, 2007; Shin et al., 2014).

Selman (1980) identified four stages in the development of children's ideas regarding friendship. According to him, children aged 3 to 5 years constituted the first stage where friends were seen as "momentary physical playmate[s]" and typically defined friendship in terms of geographical associations and shared activities (pp. 137-138).

With regard to play, studies have posited that majority of preschoolers perceive friendship to involve those peers with whom they play. For example, a qualitative study by Furman and Bierman (1983) examined the development of friendship conceptions from the ages of 4 to 7 years, where 90% of the total 64 American children interviewed regarded shared play as important. Ramazan, Ozdemir, and Beceren (2012), who investigated 40 preschoolers' views on play between the ages of 5 and 6 in Turkey, found that preschoolers viewed play as what they did with their friends. This is further supported by Vygotsky (1976), who stated that play was the principle activity of the preschool period, and Erikson (1959), who stated that play was central to children's interactions as they developed independence and initiative to engage with peers. According to Parker and Gottman (1989), the maximisation of excitement and entertainment in play has long been regarded as a principle theme of preschoolers' friendships.

Piaget's (1971, 1972) theory of cognitive development places preschoolers in the preoperational phase of development (children aged between 2 and 7 years). This phase includes the notion of perceptual centration, which refers to the tendency of preschoolers to focus on the most salient factors, such as physical appearance and shared play, and to ignore any additional characteristics (Louw & Louw, 2014). Based on this understanding, early researchers postulated that preschoolers did not make reference to personal characteristics or psychological attributes of peers, nor did they refer to internal thoughts and feelings (Selman, 1980).

These friendship features, on the other hand, are thought to have been recognised by children older than 7 years (Bigelow & La Gaipa, 1980; Furman & Bierman, 1983; Selman,

1980). For example, Bigelow and La Gaipa (1980), who examined the role of social cognitions in friendship choices among Scottish and Canadian children aged approximately 8 years to 16 years and 9 months, hypothesised that sharing with one another was typically recognised as a feature of friendship by children aged 9 years and older. Moreover, Bigelow and La Gaipa (1980) believed that children aged 11 years and older may attribute importance to emotional reciprocities such as trust, being understanding, loyal, genuine and having interests in common. Many researchers have postulated that the recognition of these kinds of affective, motivational and prosocial behaviours requires more advanced cognitive abilities not yet developed by preschoolers (Furman & Bierman, 1983).

However, recent studies such as Sebanc et al. (2007) and Shin et al. (2014) have contradicted these postulations. These studies have suggested that preschoolers are able to define their friendships in terms of affective, motivational and prosocial intentions. For example, Sebanc et al. (2007) conducted a quantitative study in California on the individual characteristics and friendship features that support the development of best friendships amongst 124 children aged 3 to 7 years. They found that being selected as a best friend was predicted by preschoolers' positive individual traits including affective, motivational and prosocial intentions (Sebanc et al., 2007). Another example is Shin et al. (2014) who performed an international, quantitative study on the convergence and dissimilarities between friendship classifications from peer sociometric data and teacher reports, involving a culturally diverse population of 410 children aged 3 to 5 years. The study found that these children could define best friendship in terms of assisting one another in activity, which emphasised peer prosocial behaviour (Shin et al., 2014).

The above suggests that preschoolers may, in fact, possess the cognitive abilities necessary to identify and appreciate the less apparent features of friendship and the personality characteristics of their friends. In addition, Sachkova (2014) found that preschoolers may

indicate the absence of negative attitudes and behaviours when defining their best friendships. This may point to preschoolers' moral development, that is, the development of "a set of principles or ideas that enables individuals to differentiate between right and wrong and to direct their behaviour accordingly" (Louw & Louw, 2014, p. 219). Children are thought to be capable of differentiating between right and wrong behaviour by the age of 2 years, and are believed to apply these moral understandings in their peer interactions (Louw & Louw, 2014).

Lastly, the defining prerequisite for establishing a preschool friendship seems to be likeability or positive regard (LaFontana & Cillessen, 2002; Lund, Kusakabe, Panda, & Wang, 2016). If a child likes the potential friend and wants to be associated with them, he or she will initiate interaction (LaFontana & Cillessen, 2002). Literature mainly reports on two aspects of friendship development amongst preschoolers, namely factors influencing preschoolers' friendship nominations and peer status amongst preschoolers. These are discussed below.

2.3. Factors influencing friendship nominations

Although peer relationships begin to emerge in the first year of life, it is only at approximately 2 to 3 years that preferences for specific peers become apparent and more dominant (Vu & Locke, 2014). This may be because during this period children develop more advanced communicative abilities (Louw & Louw, 2014), which may allow them to more effectively vocalise their interests in peers. These expressive abilities advance with age and practice (Louw & Louw, 2014). Children also start to gain more knowledge about themselves including their likes and dislikes (Louw & Louw, 2014), and may develop stronger peer preferences. The preschool classroom provides one of the first formal contexts where children can exercise these preferences (Schaefer, Light, Fabes, Hanish, & Martin, 2010). Unlike siblings or neighbours with whom youngsters may be placed as a result of adult choices, preschool offers children an abundance of partner choices forcing them to be selective (Schaefer et al., 2010). When a preschooler chooses a friend it is an indication that they are

fond of the chosen peer and demonstrates a desire to be united with and liked by this peer (Eivers et al., 2012).

A variety of factors may influence this decision regarding the nomination of a peer as a friend. Literature has highlighted the following factors: preschoolers' socially positive traits and behaviour; preschoolers' physical attractiveness; preschoolers' play and shared activities; geographical associations, and similarity amongst preschoolers. Each of these factors are discussed below.

2.3.1. Preschoolers' socially positive traits and behaviour.

Prosocial behaviour is defined as “any voluntary action that is intended to benefit another individual” such as altruism, sharing, helping and empathy (Louw & Louw, 2014, p. 218). Early researchers such as Bigelow and La Gaipa (1980) proclaimed that these features of friendship are less apparent and hypothesised that they may only be recognised by children older than 7 years. Bigelow and La Gaipa (1980) also postulated that prosocial sharing was a friendship feature of children aged 9 to 10 years and no younger. However, recent studies have regarded prosocial traits and behaviours to be important to the friendship choices of preschoolers aged 4 to 6 years as well, and have indicated that preschoolers are capable of recognising these traits (Eivers et al., 2012; Furman & Bierman, 1983; Ogelman & Secer, 2012). For example, Ogelman and Secer (2012), who performed a quantitative study on the choices of friendship among 96 5- and 6-year-old preschoolers in Turkey, found that prosocial behaviour was the dominant predictor of their friendship nominations.

Furthermore, modern developmental literature posits that children are capable of displaying intentional prosocial behaviours and moral sensitivity towards peers from the age of 2 (Louw & Louw, 2014). These children are believed to be able to demonstrate an understanding of the emotions of peers and are thought to be capable of responding in

compassionate ways, for example, assisting a peer who has fallen and been hurt (Louw & Louw, 2014). As mentioned in Louw and Louw (2014), preschoolers are thought to differ in the amount of prosocial behaviour that they display. For example, those who are better able to control their emotions are believed to be more altruistic (Louw & Louw, 2014). Researchers such as Stanhope, Bell, and Parker-Cohen (1987) further posit that preschoolers' temperament, defined as "the inherited personality traits that appear early in life" (Buss & Plomin, 1984, p. 2), may either promote or discourage prosocial behaviour, essentially impacting the degree to which they are liked by their peers.

Stanhope et al. (1987) investigated the relationship between prosocial helping behaviour and temperament amongst 24 American children aged 3 to 5 in a quantitative study involving preschool teachers' and mothers' ratings of children's social responsiveness. This study found that extroverted preschoolers, who were naturally social, displayed frequent helping behaviour and were considered to be thoughtful and genuine (Stanhope et al., 1987). These children seemed to illustrate a preference for being in the company of others, and may have been exposed to many social situations in which they may have been able to build new friendships (Stanhope et al., 1987). Through peer interactions, extroverted children may develop an understanding of others and learn important skills such as perspective-taking. According to Stanhope et al. (1987), passive, introverted preschoolers, who are often behaviourally inhibited, tend to have less experience in interacting with others, and, because of this, they may not always manifest the skills necessary to interpret the needs of others. This may result in them responding to peers in socially inappropriate ways and be disliked for this. Consequently, it may be less likely that they would be selected as friends. Extroverted children have also been found to have a good sense of humour, which has been associated with peer likeability (Semrud-Clikeman & Glass, 2010), and is considered to be a crucial part of preschool interactions. According to McGhee's (1979) stages of humour development, children

aged 3 to 5 begin to play with word sounds to produce humour. At these ages, humour is understood to be related to cognitive growth, as the manipulation of word sounds requires sufficient cognitive creativity (Guo, Zhang, Wang, & Xeromeritou, 2011).

Preschoolers who display cooperation, trust, and who communicate openly with peers have also often been favoured as friends. Preschoolers tend to choose as friends those who are understanding, who are affectively expressive, who engage in turn-taking, who are fair, and who respond to their peers' initiation attempts with warmth (Eivers et al., 2012; Findlay, Girardi, & Coplan, 2006; Goldstein, Field, & Healy, 1989; Semrud-Clikeman & Glass, 2010). The most successful initiations of friendship appear to involve responding to gestures of friendship with like gestures, which suggests a concept of reciprocity (Schaefer et al., 2010). Reciprocity is considered to be a significant feature of social interactions, which some argue to be responsible for the stability of society (Schaefer et al., 2010). By the age of 4, most children have at least one reciprocated friendship (Schaefer et al., 2010). However, it is often those children who most effectively reciprocate others' efforts of friendship during shared activities, who have several reciprocated friendships and are better liked (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996).

Preschoolers who are accomplished at adopting the perspectives of classmates, and thereby ease their way into ongoing interactions, are better liked than those who are egocentric and endeavour to disrupt activity (Huyder & Nilsen, 2012). This may present as a challenge to some as, according to Piaget's (1971, 1972) cognitive developmental theory, preschool aged children are typically egocentric, which means that they may struggle to comprehend the viewpoints of others. Those who manifest more advanced cognitive abilities such as reciprocal thought, may be better equipped to grasp others' perspectives, may be better liked and may be more often selected as friends (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2007). This draws on the theory of mind, which is defined as "a set of opinions constructed by a child (and adult) to explain other people's ideas, beliefs, desires and behaviour" (Louw & Louw, 2014, p. 164). Theory of mind

is thought to develop throughout the preschool period, and tends to be fully developed between the ages of 4 and 5 (Louw & Louw, 2014). Preschoolers who manifest advanced theory of mind skills are suggested to be better able to comprehend peers and provide more meaningful responses, and are thus more likely to be perceived as attractive social partners (Fink, Begeer, Peterson, Slaughter, & De Rosnay, 2015).

Conflict involving competition for equipment, reluctance to follow and hostility, is virtually inevitable in relationships that involve interdependent interactions (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995). Researchers have described friendship as a “universal good marked by some interpersonal conflict” (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995, p. 306). Preschoolers who manifest effective conflict resolution skills and who are motivated to resolve conflict tend to establish positive peer relationships, and may have more friends (Salvas et al., 2014). When Salvas et al. (2014) examined the role of friendship conflict in the development of generalised physical aggression, and the moderating role of relational and physical characteristics among 745 Canadian twins aged 6 to 7, the results suggested that friendship success may be determined by how well children are able to resolve disputes when they arise.

Furthermore, responding to conflict may be challenging for some. There are substantial differences in the objectives and the behavioural strategies that preschoolers may embrace in conflict situations (Salvas et al., 2014). Those who focus on maintaining good relationships and engaging in cooperative strategies are more successful in their friendships than those who focus on getting their own way (Salvas et al., 2014). While conflict is a feature of friendship, incessant conflict is problematic. Preschoolers exposed to continuous conflict may become aggressive, leading to peer rejection (Salvas et al., 2014). Boys are at greater risk for this as they are believed to be more assertive in their peer interactions (Johnson et al., 2000; Louw & Louw, 2014). Monitoring conflictual relationships can allow for an identification of what kinds of friendships may place preschoolers at risk for psychosocial problems (Salvas et al., 2014).

2.3.2. Preschoolers' physical attractiveness.

In preschool friendships, gene-environment correlations can become important. Environmental influences such as peer relationships are impacted by an individual's genetic predisposition (Brendgen, 2012). Studies have shown that preschoolers may be liked by the peer group due to heritable characteristics such as physical appearance (Adams & Crane, as cited in Drewry & Clark, 1985; Brendgen, 2012). This is known as evocative gene-environment correlation (Brendgen & Boivin, 2011). A gap in South African literature regarding the tie between preschoolers' physical attractiveness and friendship nominations was identified. However, a relationship between these two components has been found in international research. For example, Drewry and Clark's (1985) quantitative study investigated friendship reciprocity and aspects associated with popularity amongst 72 children aged 3 to 5 in the United States. They found that those who were physically attractive were commonly chosen as friends, and were the most popular within the peer group (Drewry & Clark, 1985).

In addition, Edelman (2009) examined the relative contributions of physical attractiveness and prosocial behaviour in 75 children's friendship choices between the ages of 3 and 5 in the United States. The study found that 3-year-old preschoolers manifested a greater preference for physical attraction as opposed to prosocial behaviour when choosing their friends (Edelman, 2009). However, different preferences were found for 4-year-old preschoolers based on gender. Females were found to prefer kind peers, while males displayed a preference for attractive peers (Edelman, 2009). The study suggested that girls aged 4 upward generally choose friends on the basis of their peers' prosocial behaviour, whereas boys are more likely to base their friendship choices on the physical attractiveness of their peers (Edelman, 2009).

An international study conducted by Hawley, Johnson, Mize, and McNamara (2007) found that social dominance also played a part in preschoolers' perceptions of attractiveness.

The study examined the relationship of 153 3- to 6-year-old children's physical attractiveness with power, status, aggression and social skills by means of collecting teacher ratings. The results indicated that socially dominant or popular preschoolers, who tended to be aggressive and employed both prosocial and bullying strategies of resource control, were perceived to be the most attractive preschoolers within the peer group (Hawley et al., 2007). This finding suggested that status and dominance may be linked to preschoolers' physical attractiveness, such that those who have a high status and who are dominant, also tend to be the most attractive within the peer group (Hawley et al., 2007).

2.3.3. Preschoolers' play and shared activities.

Some of the earliest literature regarding preschoolers' friendships emphasises play, shared activities and the exchanging of toys or materials as the principle criterion used by preschoolers when choosing their friends (Corsaro, 1985; Furman & Bierman, 1983; Hayes, Gershman, & Bolin, 1980). For example, in a qualitative study by Furman and Bierman (1983) who examined the development of friendship conceptions, shared play was regarded as important by 90% of the total 64 American children aged between 4 and 7. This is supported by a study by Field, Miller, and Field (1994) who explored how accurately preschoolers knew those peers who they identified as their friends. The study found that the most common reasons for having a friend among the sample of 16 preschoolers included play and a fondness for the chosen peer (Field et al., 1994). This is emphasised by developmental theorists such as Vygotsky (1976) who stated that play is the principle activity of the preschool period.

It is also thought that increased physical development during the preschool period benefits preschoolers' play and aids friendship development. By the age of 4, preschoolers have developed the appropriate motor skills for active or functional play, also referred to as exercise play (Gmitrova, Podhajecka, & Gmitrov, 2009; Lindsey, 2014; Pellegrini & Smith, 1998). Exercise play, including running, twisting and jumping, may in turn stimulate gross and fine

motor development (Louw & Louw, 2014). The greater children's ability to interact, the more adept playmates they tend to become, elevating their levels of attractiveness to peers who value entertaining play partners (Lindsey, 2014). Those involved in exercise play have been found to form friends with ease (Lindsey, 2014; Pellegrini & Smith, 1998). Running, jumping, spinning and falling to the ground are all actions employed to form games and activities and, most importantly, to build relationships with peers (Bertran, 2015).

As articulated by Vygotsky (1976) and others such as Duncan and Tarulli (2003), the central feature of preschoolers' peer interactions is positive, highly charged and coordinated play. Play has been found to increase in frequency throughout the preschool period (Eggum-Wilkens et al., 2014). In addition, play with friends has been documented to be lengthier and more frequent than play with non-friends (Doyle, Connolly, & Rivest, 1980). Given the central role of play during the preschool period, and its contributions to friendship development, it is not surprising that researchers have become increasingly interested in the association between various forms of play and preschoolers' selection of peers as friends. Guralnick and Groom (1988) found that preschoolers who engaged in frequent group play had a greater number of friends than those who preferred to play alone or with one peer. These findings resulted from an international study on the friendship patterns of 16 mildly developmentally delayed children aged 4, 24 non-handicapped children aged 3, and 24 non-handicapped children aged 4 via videotaped recordings. Preschoolers who play in groups also interact with numerous peers on a regular basis, making it easier for them to develop friendships and increasing their chances of being selected by peers as friends (Guralnick & Groom, 1988).

According to Roopnarine and Field (1984), preschoolers who are considered to be best friends tend to spend a significant amount of time in parallel play together, requesting and following one another. Preschool friend dyads tend to show greater amounts of imitation and interactive competence during play than acquaintance dyads (Goldstein et al., 1989). For

example, in an international study involving 24 children aged 2 to 5 years, Goldstein et al. (1989) found that friend dyads showed greater reciprocity and interdependence during play, allowing turn taking and learning than with acquaintance dyads. Friends tend to imitate each other and recognise their friendship as being based on co-operative play (Werebe & Baudonniere, 1988). This suggests that preschoolers may be more likely to select peers who embrace co-operative, parallel play, and who will both imitate and follow during play, as friends.

A study by Tannock (2011) indicated the importance of rough-and-tumble play. The study explored rough-and-tumble play amongst 17 5-year-olds in Australia and found that both boys and girls who engaged in rough-and-tumble play were selected as friends more often than those who did not. Rough-and-tumble play, characterised by play fighting and chase, was perceived to serve the social function of maintaining dominance in the peer group (Tannock, 2011). Moreover, Colwell and Lindsey (2005) conducted a quantitative study in the United States on play and social competence among 60 preschoolers aged between 4 and 6. They found that rough-and-tumble play was strongly related to likeability and peer selection, and that preschoolers who took part in same-gender play were better liked than those who took part in other-gender play (Colwell & Lindsey, 2005). This indicates that infringements on typical gender boundary rules could predict peer rejection with preschoolers appearing to show a strong preference for same-gender peers (Belle, 1989; Graham, Cohen, Zbikowski, & Secrist, 1998). This is elaborated upon when *Similarity amongst preschoolers* is discussed below.

Toy-mediated play also has an effect on friend selection. Lindsey (2014) looked at the differences between rough-and-tumble play and exercise play in relation to peer competence among 148 Euro-American preschoolers aged between 4 and 6. The study suggested that preschoolers who engaged in high levels of toy-mediated play tended to be better liked and thus more often selected as friends (Lindsey, 2014). Preschoolers who have more access to toys

are thought to manifest elevated levels of status, and tend to be approached as attractive partners (Lindsey, 2014). However, peer play involving toys is not always positive (Ramani, Brownell, & Campbell, 2010). Ramani et al. (2010) performed an international study on the measures of regulation and dysregulation that anticipated the positive and negative peer interactions of 435 3- to 4-year-olds. They stated that disputes over toys could escalate into verbal and physical aggression (Ramani et al., 2010). The study emphasised the importance of fostering self-regulation during early childhood, highlighting its significance to the establishment of friendships during this period (Ramani et al., 2010).

2.3.4. Propinquity amongst preschoolers.

Studies have found that geographical associations are important to preschoolers' friend nominations. Bigelow and La Gaipa (1980), Lindsey (2002) and Shin et al. (2014) state that propinquity is a powerful criterion of preschoolers' peer selections. Selman (1980), who examined the way in which 3- to 5-year-old children define their friends, found that two factors in friend selection were dominant, namely shared activities and geographical associations. Children who were situated close to one another liked each other and were more likely to nominate each other as friends (Selman, 1980). Increased proximity may elevate the likelihood of contact amongst preschoolers, permitting more frequent associations, which may promote friendship amongst them. This may be explained by the general propinquity-attraction hypothesis, which states that the closer the proximity between two individuals, the more likely they are to be fond of one another (Nisbett, Gilovich, & Keltner, 2005; Segal, 1974). Propinquity has been considered to have a significant impact on friendships between individuals of all ages, races and social classes (Nisbett et al., 2005).

Moreover, it is thought that increased proximity may assist in the formation of cross-group friendships (Pettigrew, 2008). Allport's (1954) intergroup contact theory may explain this. It suggests that intergroup contact reduces prejudice between groups and enhances liking

(Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011). This could therefore be of value in the South African context, which encompasses a long history of intergroup discrimination stemming from Apartheid. If South African preschoolers belonging to diverse racial groups, for example, are placed in propinquity with one another, the chances of interaction among them may be elevated. This contact may diminish long-standing discriminatory outlooks, improve intergroup attitudes, and promote cross-group friendships (Pettigrew et al., 2011).

2.3.5. Similarity amongst preschoolers.

As typical egocentric thinkers occupying the preoperational phase of development (2 to 7 years), preschoolers' perceptions of themselves and others typically encompass all-or-none thinking, and they appear to indicate a global preference for those who are like them (Piaget, 1971). It therefore seems understandable that preschoolers tend to choose friends who are similar to them (Deutz et al., 2015). Similarity is thought to underlie attraction and has been confirmed to be a key component of friendship (Byrne, 1971). In particular, literature states that similarity amongst preschoolers in terms of attributions and behavioural tendencies, interests and tastes, as well as physical appearance and demographic variables including, gender, race and ethnicity, may influence their friendship nominations (DeRosier et al., 1994; Fawcett & Markson, 2010; Sanefuji, 2013; Sebanc et al., 2007).

Similarity in attributions and behavioural tendencies.

Similarity in terms of attributions and behavioural tendencies have long been studied as predictors of preschoolers' friendship choices (Austin & Thompson, 1948; DeRosier et al., 1994). Studies have found that from the age of 5, children appear to be more similar in constructs (the templates through which they categorise and differentiate the features of their world) and attitudes to friends than to non-friends (Erwin, 1985).

In terms of behavioural orientations, literature has suggested that similarity in play style is important to preschoolers' friend nominations. For example, Goldstein et al. (1989) performed a study in Florida using observations and child and teacher ratings to examine the association of play and physiology amongst 34 children aged between 2 and 4. They found that those who referred to each other as friends manifested similar play behaviours, namely parallel play, requesting and following (Goldstein et al., 1989). Friends also displayed a similarity in the duration of time spent engaging in these play behaviours, whereas acquaintances differed in the amount of time spent (Goldstein et al., 1989).

Similarity in interests and tastes.

Similarity in interests and tastes is considered central to preschoolers' friendship nominations. For example, in a study conducted by Rekalidou and Petrogiannis (2012), "common interests" were found to be a key reason for friendship selection amongst a sample of 70 Greek preschoolers aged 4 to 6, alongside "play", "closeness/kinship", and "personality characteristics" (p. 179). The importance attributed to common interests draws on the notion of "homophily", that is, the tendency of like-minded individuals to be attracted to one another (Farmer & Farmer, 1996, p. 433). Concurrently, studies show that children whose interests are highly discrepant from the interests of the mainstream peer group may have difficulties establishing friendships (Erwin, 1985). These children often cannot identify with nor meaningfully engage peers, and thus may be at risk for peer rejection (Erwin, 1985). Parents may play a pivotal role in preschoolers' social lives by fostering interests in them that may help them to connect with peers and thereby form friendships (Erwin, 1985).

Similarity of physical appearance and demographic variables.

Literature has found that preschoolers tend to select friends who they perceive to look similar to them. For example, similar physical appearance was found to strongly affect

friendship selection in a quantitative study conducted by Sanefuji (2013) involving 62 4- to 5-year-olds in Japan. A characteristic typical of the preoperational stage occupied by preschoolers is the use of concrete, observable cues to categorise themselves and others (Ramsey & Myers, 1990). Preschoolers have therefore also been found to select friends who have similar demographic variables as them including gender, race or ethnicity (Fawcett & Markson, 2010; Fishbein & Imai, 1993; George & Hartmann, 1996). These are thought to offer preschoolers a physically salient means of determining their similarity to peers and provide a foundation for mutual approval as well as a means of confirmation for their developing social identities (Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Gest, & Garipey, 1988; Hallinan, 1980).

One of the most prominent recorded patterns in preschoolers' friendships is the tendency to prefer same-gender peers as friends, leading to preschool peer groups being strongly gender segregated (Belle, 1989; Graham et al., 1998). As stated in Louw and Louw (2014), children are able to identify themselves as male or female between the ages of 2 ½ and 3 years. This is known as the establishment of gender identity (Louw & Louw, 2014). Gender identity is thought to be critical to the development of gender roles, defined as "the behaviour patterns and attitudes that are viewed as appropriate or typical for a male or female of a specific society" (Louw & Louw, 2014, p. 195).

Gender-role development or the development of gendered behaviours and attitudes, is believed to involve three dominant processes, namely the establishment of gender identity, the procurement of gender stereotypes, and the acquisition of gender-typed behaviours (Louw & Louw, 2014). With the identification of themselves as male or female (the establishment of gender identity), preschoolers are thought to become conscious of gender stereotypes (the procurement of gender stereotypes) (Louw & Louw, 2014). For example, preschoolers would recognise which toys, games or colours are tied to each gender. Preschoolers often approach gender stereotypes in absolute terms by, for example, believing that boys cannot bake cakes

and that girls cannot play with building tools (Louw & Louw, 2014). Children may learn these stereotypes through observing and imitating others (Markovits, Benenson, & Dolenszky, 2001). According to Bandura's (1977, 1986) social learning theory, children learn vicariously by observing and modelling the behaviours of parents, siblings, teachers, peers or television characters, for example. As early as the preschool age, children are believed to display behaviours characteristic of their gender, known as "gender-typed behaviours" (Louw & Louw, 2014, p. 196).

Gender as a friendship selection criterion can be displayed by the age of 3 (Aydin & Corsaro, 2003). Whilst some researchers suggest that preschoolers' same-gender preference is purely based on the observable features of gender such as appearance, others attribute this tendency to gendered play styles linked to gender-typed behaviours (Louw & Louw, 2014; Underwood, 2007). Maccoby's (1998) two-culture theory posits that girls prefer to play with girls because they play in smaller groups with close relationships, intimacy and care being emphasised, whereas boys prefer to play with boys because they play in larger groups often characterised by competitiveness, conflict and aggression.

Furthermore, girls tend to score higher on positive friendship qualities and communicative styles, and are believed to be more skilled at deciphering social messages from facial expressions and attitudes (Bertran, 2015; Erwin, 1985; Louw & Louw, 2014). For this reason, girls may be more affectionate in their responses to peers. They also tend to regard aggressive behaviours as more unacceptable than boys (Goldstein, Tisak, & Boxer, 2002). As a result of distinctive gendered play styles and preferences, preschoolers' tend to interact with same-gender peers and are more likely to nominate same-gender peers as friends (Mehta & Strough, 2009; Underwood, 2007).

In addition, children as young as 3 are believed to display an awareness of race and portray own-race bias, preferring same-race or same-ethnicity peers as friends (Graham &

Cohen, 1997). Njoroge et al., as cited in Louw and Louw (2014), define race as a “socio-political construct” which “is used to describe observable differences in individuals, such as their skin colour or other visible physical differences” (p. 202). Ethnicity refers to an individual’s cultural background “which is typically associated with a specific (language) group” (Njoroge et al., as cited in Louw & Louw, 2014, p. 202). Children’s racial self-concept and ethnic identity are thought to develop alongside that of their gender-identity (Louw & Louw, 2014). According to Siegler et al., as cited in Louw and Louw (2014), ethnic identity develops in accordance with five components, namely ethnic knowledge (children’s understanding that their ethnic group has distinctive features that distinguish the group from another); ethnic self-identification (the classification of themselves as a member of the ethnic group); ethnic constancy (children’s comprehension that the distinctive features of the ethnic group do not alter over time, and that they will always belong to the ethnic group); ethnic-role behaviours (children’s involvement in the behaviours typical to their ethnic group), and ethnic feelings and preferences (the way in which children feel about being members of the ethnic group) (p. 203). Children’s ethnic identity continues to develop throughout childhood (Louw & Louw, 2014).

The notion of egocentrism in Piaget’s (1971, 1972) theory of cognitive development further supports children’s preferences for what is the same, for example, friends of the same race or ethnicity. For young children, the same is seen as being “good” and different is seen as “bad” because of their difficulty in comprehending the different perspectives of others (Barron, 2011, p. 659). It is important to note that international researchers have made it clear that there is little evidence of preschoolers being negative towards other groups. Rather, it is a case of preferring peers who are similar rather than disliking those who are different (Kowalski, 2003). As mentioned in Louw and Louw (2014), preschool aged children do not necessarily understand the significance of their ethnic group though they may label themselves according

to their skin colour or refer to themselves as either English or Xhosa speaking, for example, during social interactions.

Barron (2011), who examined two ethnic groups of preschoolers, namely Pakistani British and White British from a preschool in England, found that preschoolers largely played with peers of the same ethnic group and favoured them as friends. When there was contact between Pakistani British and White British preschoolers, there were often disputes (Barron, 2011). Whilst traditional developmental psychologists describe preschoolers' selections of friends in terms of internal processes tied to egocentrism, socio-cultural perspectives argue the importance of preschoolers' cultural context (Barron, 2011). Every ethnic group is thought to embrace its own unique beliefs, values, customs, norms and patterns of interaction which are passed down from generation to generation to formulate individuals' culture (Louw & Louw, 2014). This may impact the way in which people perceive and engage with others (Louw & Louw, 2014).

These points speak to Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979) ecological systems theory, specifically to the macrosystem, which emphasises the influence of the greater cultural and societal context on child development. From this perspective, Barron (2011) found that preschoolers' choices of friends based on ethnicity, were more complex than initially thought. He observed that the preschool's everyday practices and activities created a strong boundary between the two ethnic groups involved in his study (Barron, 2011). The majority of the White British staff tended to implement activities which some of the Pakistani British preschoolers' previous cultural practices and experiences had not prepared them for (Barron, 2011). The preschoolers who did not know how to respond to these activities faced marginalisation from those who did, were observed as dissimilar or as 'Other', and were dismissed as friends (Barron, 2011). It became evident that the preschool's adherence to particular cultural practices encouraged preschoolers to portray their identities in ways that were familiar ("like us") or

foreign (“not like us”) to peers based on previous experiences and norms characteristic of their cultural group (Barron, 2011, p. 655). This could have impacted the friendships that the preschoolers formed.

This is particularly relevant in a South African context, where the Apartheid system fostered sensitive racial relationships. Even though Apartheid ended in 1994, some South Africans still entertain discriminatory attitudes towards racially diverse Others (Finchilescu et al., 2007; Sinclair et al., 2005). These discriminatory attitudes may be passed on to younger generations, distorting the likelihood that they may develop friendships with racially diverse peers. Interestingly, a study conducted by Exenberger (2003) found that race significantly influenced the friendship choices of black South African preschoolers, whereas the friendship choices of black preschoolers located in London were influenced more by sex. It may be speculated that a preference for same-race peers may be more prominent amongst a South African preschool population.

Therefore, upon entry into the preschool peer group, preschoolers formulate judgements about who they favour as friends based on certain factors. These factors also determine an individual preschooler’s likeability, commonly referred to as “peer status”, within the peer group (LaFontana & Cillessen, 2002, p. 635). To date, no studies regarding preschoolers’ peer status have been conducted in a South African context. The present study can thus be considered novel in this regard.

2.4. Preschoolers and peer status

As mentioned, peer status refers to the degree to which children are liked or disliked by peers (Asher & McDonald, 2009; LaFontana & Cillessen, 2002). Literature posits that once a preschooler acquires a reputation it is difficult to alter, even if the preschooler’s behaviour changes (Johnson et al., 2000). Preschoolers’ reputations are generally formed early on and

appear to be relatively stable throughout the preschool period (Denham & Holt, 1993; Walker, 2009). For example, when Denham and Holt (1993) assessed international preschool teachers' ratings of 43 3- to 4-year-olds' positive and negative behaviour and peer-rated sociometric likability, they found that peer judgements were made at approximately 3 years and 9 months of age at the beginning of the preschool year. Furthermore, these emerged as stable reputations that remained with them over the two year period during which the study was conducted (Denham & Holt, 1993). Walker (2009), who investigated the stability of peer status among 187 Australian preschoolers aged 4 years and 6 months to 5 years and 6 months, also found that the status of rejected preschoolers was relatively stable across time, while popular, neglected and average status groups showed a fair degree of stability. According to Walker (2009), it is important to determine preschoolers' peer status to help identify those preschoolers who may be at risk for long-term social isolation. In the present study, two peer status groups were addressed, namely high peer status and low peer status.

High peer status preschoolers are those who receive the most peer nominations as a 'best friend' or 'friend' and who are rated as more friendly, socially sensitive, helpful and considerate (Denham & Holt, 1993; Walker, 2009). These preschoolers are highly liked, being most prominent or influential, and often display positive behaviour such as smiling while manifesting low levels of aggression and victimisation (Walker, 2009; Nelson, Burner, Coyne, Hart, & Robinson, 2016; Newcomb, Bukowski, & Pattee, 1993). According to Denham, McKinley, Couchoud, and Holt (1990), who investigated the emotional and behavioural predictors of peer ratings among 65 preschoolers with a mean age of 3 years and 6 months, the knowledge of emotional display rules appeared to be related to a high peer status, as well as to prosocial behaviour.

Preschoolers who understand emotions are thought to be more affectionate, and tend to respond to others appropriately (Denham et al., 1990). Consequently, they are more likely to

be favoured and selected as friends (Findlay et al., 2006). According to Walker (2009), high peer status preschoolers tend to be confident, have a high level of communicative competence, and often partake in ongoing connected conversations. Walker (2009) also posits that communication strategies which promote reciprocal conversation may be one of the principle correlates of popularity amongst preschoolers. Good communication skills are believed to add to the successful initiation and maintenance of preschool friendships, and are thus thought to promote preschoolers' popularity (Parkhurst & Gottman, 1986).

High peer status preschoolers who are socially competent also tend to engage in higher levels of ongoing complex, cooperative or pretend play, paying attention to turn-taking and responsiveness, and often develop adequate leadership skills through play (Howes & Matheson, 1992). According to Hartup, as cited in Sachkova (2014), preschoolers' social competence plays a central role in determining peer status. Being able to organise games, having an elaborate knowledge of game rules and adhering to them are understood to elevate status (Sachkova, 2014). According to Erikson's (1959) psychosocial developmental theory, the ability of children to take initiative in peer interactions, to assume leadership, to be independent and to accomplish goals within a social setting, may lead to the establishment of initiative. Erikson (1959) regarded this to be a principle developmental task for children aged between 2 and 6. Conversely, failure to plan activities and to successfully engage peers may result in a sense of guilt (Erikson, 1959). This may define low peer status preschoolers. These children, who are often withdrawn, may not have the opportunity to develop initiative through peer interactions (Nelson et al., 2016).

Low peer status preschoolers are not as well-liked as high peer status preschoolers, receive fewer peer nominations and may be disregarded by peers. Nelson et al. (2016), who performed a study on the correlates of sociometric status amongst 221 Russian preschoolers aged approximately 3 years and 7 months to 6 years and 5 months, suggest that low peer status

preschoolers are predominantly unsociable. They may be shy, stubborn, aggressive or moody, or may be disinterested in peers, struggling to form friendships (Nelson et al., 2016; Sachkova, 2014). These preschoolers are believed to display neutral or negative affect more often than positive affect (Nelson et al., 2016; Walker, 2009), and may illustrate difficulties in emotional expression, regulation and understanding (Walker, 2009). According to Walker (2009), the early socialisation of emotions in family contexts should be prioritised as emotions strongly impact the potential of children to develop relationships throughout their lives. Low peer status preschoolers may be engaged in non-social play, including unoccupied or solitary play, and are at risk of being isolated if educational facilitators do not regulate their activities (Walker, 2009). Moreover, Sachkova (2014) found the absence of developed game skills to be typical of this status group. As they are often not able to collaborate effectively with peers in play, they may be deprived of the developmental benefits that play may offer such as the opportunity to practice gross and fine motor skills, as well as communication and cognitive abilities (Louw & Louw, 2014).

Preschoolers receiving few peer nominations are often thought to be neglected and are at the highest risk for later maladjustment (Nelson et al., 2016). They may experience numerous negative outcomes including minimal social competence, loneliness, victimisation, as well as emotional disorders including anxiety and conduct disorders such as severe aggression (Nelson et al., 2016). Interventions involving social skills training may encourage victimised peers to be demonstrative in social contexts, develop confidence to engage positively with peers, and thus avoid social isolation (Nelson et al., 2016). It may be beneficial to include educational facilitators in efforts to identify rejected preschoolers, and encourage them to partake in social coaching to promote rejected preschoolers' positive interactions. It is crucial to address this early on as the preschool years encompass the years of the significant neurological and psychological malleability (Nelson et al., 2016).

To conclude, peer status is an indicator of peer acceptance, companionship and the peer group's collective perceptions of a child (Betts et al., 2012; Hymel et al., 2002). Preschoolers who are more liked than disliked are more successful at entering play groups, seem to have lower levels of internalising and externalising problems and are more engaged in school (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003). The ability to integrate into a setting and be liked is vital for school adjustment and success, and thus understanding the factors that influence peer status is important (Betts et al., 2012). In the present study, the number of times a preschooler was nominated as a "best friend" and as an "other friend" jointly determined the preschooler's peer status.

2.5. Chapter summary

In this chapter, a review of literature regarding preschoolers' friendships, their friendship nominations and peer status amongst them was provided. The factors that have been found in previous studies to influence preschoolers' best friend and friend nominations were explored. This was followed by a discussion of peer status amongst preschoolers, which investigated the common differences between high peer status and low peer status preschool groups. The following chapter addresses the theoretical framework for the present study.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Introduction

Chapter 3 presents theoretical frameworks that may be used to explain and understand the formation of friendships amongst preschoolers. Firstly, the developmental stage occupied by the preschoolers involved in the present study will be contextualised. Thereafter, the researcher will discuss the contextual and social perspectives on development. The contextual perspective will place emphasis on Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979) ecological systems theory. The social perspective will include Bowlby's (1958) theory of attachment, as well as Allport's (1954) intergroup conflict theory. Following this, relevant developmental theories are discussed. These include Bandura's (1977, 1986) social learning theory, Piaget's (1971, 1972) cognitive developmental theory and Erikson's (1959) psychosocial developmental theory. These theories are understood to be suitable in understanding and explaining the development and nature of preschoolers' friendships.

3.2. Contextualising the developmental stage of preschoolers

This section contextualises the developmental stage of the present study's sample of preschoolers aged 4 to 6 years. Children this age constitute the early childhood period, which comprises children aged 2 to 6 years (Louw & Louw, 2014). Children's social and cognitive development is amplified during this period (Illingworth, Nair, & Russel, 2013). The experiences they encounter impact whether or not their developing brain architecture provides a robust or weak foundation for learning, behaviour and for health. Early interactions and relationships with parents and peers foster pathways for children's emotional security, sense of agency, self-regulation and social behaviour (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003). Moreover, the learning experiences encountered during early childhood are believed to contribute to future

scholastic achievement (Bateman, 2012). It is thus a period which has a significant impact on individuals' development and future success.

3.3. Contextual perspective: Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

Through a contextual lens, child development is understood to be shaped by the child's surrounding environment and the various systems which influence a child, be it directly or indirectly. Contextual theorists highlight the importance of culture and community, and posit that there is a dynamic relationship between a person and their greater social context (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979) ecological systems theory endorses this contextual approach to development. His theory may help describe friendship development amongst preschoolers within a South African context. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), child development occurs across five interdependent sub-systems, which together form the social context or ecological system within which the child resides and develops. These include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The development of preschool friendships and the nature of these cannot be fully understood unless the environmental context in which the child develops is considered.

An influential system in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory is the *microsystem*. This is the first system and constitutes the direct environment of the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It may include the child's parents, siblings, teachers, peers, home and other immediate settings such as the neighbourhood and preschool environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These individuals and settings have a dominant influence on child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In application, parents, being prominent figures of the microsystem, are understood to impact preschoolers' friendship development (Michiels, Grietens, Onghena, & Kuppens, 2008). For example, studies have shown that parents, by means of the manner in which they engage with their children, may impact the way in which children interact with their peers (e.g. Howard et al., 2016; Vreeke, Muris, Mayer, Huijding, & Rapee,

2013). This is important to consider, as the formation of peer relationships has been declared to be one of the most significant social developmental tasks in early childhood (Erikson, 1959). Friendships offer preschoolers the opportunity to practice social skills (Sachkova, 2014), and to develop a sense of initiative through the successful planning, initiation and facilitation of activities and games (Erikson, 1959).

One way in which parents may hinder preschoolers' friendship development is through overprotective parenting. This entails excessive rules over child activities, child dependence on parents, and instruction to the child regarding how they ought to think and feel (McLeod, Wood, & Weisz, 2007). Overprotective parents typically convey a message to children that the world is unsafe or frightening (Gere, Villabo, Torgersen, & Kendall, 2012). According to Bandura's (1977, 1986) social learning theory, children typically learn behaviour by observing and modelling the behaviour of others. Young children may learn fearful behaviour from a parent and as they begin to perceive the world as a fearsome place they may develop anxiety (Gere et al., 2012). Children who suffer from anxiety tend to be behaviourally inhibited (Howard et al., 2016; Howard, 2015; Wege, 2014). Behavioural inhibition refers to a temperament recognised in early childhood, where children display apprehension and withdrawal in the presence of strangers and unfamiliar objects or settings (Kagan et al., as cited in Howard, 2015). Anxious and behaviourally inhibited children can become victims of peer rejection (Coplan, Arbeau, & Armer, 2008; Rubin, Coplan, & Bowker, 2009; Stevenson-Hinde, Shouldice, & Chicot, 2011).

Evidence for the association between overprotective parenting, anxiety and behavioural inhibition is provided by international and South African studies. In terms of international research, Vreeke et al. (2013) explored the relations between behavioural inhibition, overprotective parenting and anxiety in a group of 168 Dutch preschoolers aged 6. They found that overprotective parenting was predictive of preschoolers' anxiety (Vreeke et al., 2013). The

study also found that preschoolers who were anxious tended to be behaviourally inhibited (Vreeke et al., 2013). By means of parent reports, a South African study performed by Howard et al. (2016), similarly found a positive relationship between parental overprotection, behavioural inhibition and symptoms of anxiety in a group of 59 children aged 2 to 6. Interestingly, children who had been exposed to a high level of parental overprotection, and who showed high behavioural inhibition, were found to display the greatest anxiety disorder symptoms (Howard et al., 2016). Parents should be encouraged to ensure that preschoolers perceive the world as a safe place, where they should explore their environment and engage with others in order to build friendships.

The second system of Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979) ecological model is the *mesosystem*. This system encompasses the relationship or linkages residing between two or more environments in which the child develops (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This would include, for example, the relationship between the child's home and preschool. Home and preschool environments that are constantly changing may trigger distress in young children (Illingworth et al., 2013). This may prevent them from being open to interacting with others and limits their potential to establish friendships.

The third system of the ecological model is the *exosystem*. It includes those settings that are not part of the child's immediate environment but which may impact his or her development, for example, the relationship between a child's home and a parent's work setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Although a child does not have direct contact with the parent's place of work, a stressful work environment may cause a parent to become short-tempered in the home. They may have erratic mood swings and may neglect the child due to a preoccupation with work commitments (Daniels & Moos, 1988; Repetti & Wood, 1997). Daniels and Moos (1988) conducted an international study on 133 families to examine exosystem influences on families' and children's functioning. It was found that parents exposed to high levels of job

stress tended to be controlling and less emotionally involved with their family (Daniels & Moos, 1988). Children may develop internalising disorders such as anxiety due to their parents' transferred stress or emotional neglect (Daniels & Moos, 1988), which may impact their potential to interact and form friendships.

The *macrosystem* constitutes the fourth system of the ecological model. It involves the greater political and cultural context within which the other systems reside, namely the microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This includes the greater cultural and societal context within which a child is embedded, including cultural values and norms, belief systems, customs and religion as well as political conditions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These may impact friendship development, the nature of friendships that preschoolers form and with whom. Preschoolers with diverse belief systems and customs may not always fully understand one another, which typically hinders the development of a relationship (Barron, 2011). It is more likely that preschoolers belonging to the same culture, for example, who abide by the same cultural norms, will develop a positive peer relationship (Barron, 2011). They may be better able to understand one another and have a sense of commonality (Barron, 2011).

The *chronosystem*, the outermost system, involves changes that occur in the child's environment over time such as changes in socioeconomic status (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). It may also include changes in family structure such as a death and the impact of this throughout life (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This system will not be discussed in this chapter. The time component may be more relevant in follow-up studies. It may be better suited to a longitudinal study examining preschoolers and processes over time.

The following section will explore the social perspectives of Bowlby's (1958) theory of attachment and Allport's (1954) intergroup conflict theory. Both theories may provide insight into, and an understanding of, friendship amongst preschoolers.

3.4. Social perspective

3.4.1. Bowlby's theory of attachment.

Attachment involves the relationship or emotional bond that is thought to develop between an infant and significant individual, usually the parents, and more specifically, the mother (Bowlby, 1958). The nature of this attachment has a noteworthy impact on the child's social and emotional development (Rubin et al., 2009). Children internalise the attachment relationship which influences how they adapt to other relationship settings (Perez, Santelices, Rivera, & Farkas, 2013). Bowlby's (1958) attachment theory highlights the importance of a trusting and positive relationship between infant and primary caregiver.

The degree of responsiveness exhibited by the caregiver towards the infant, as well as the caregiver's temperament, predicts whether the infant will develop a secure or insecure attachment or not (Bowlby, 1958). A caregiver who has a warm temperament, and who is sensitive to the child's needs, encourages the development of a secure attachment (Perez et al., 2013). Other factors involved in predicting the development of a secure or insecure attachment include the child's temperament, the compatibility of the child's and caregiver's temperament, psychosocial factors, and the presence of the caregiver (Bowlby, 1958). Rejection on behalf of the caregiver tends to result in an insecure attachment (Bowlby, 1958).

Children with secure attachments tend to be confident, display prosocial behaviour and are less distressed when separated from the primary caregiver (Bowlby, 1958). These children are more likely to explore unfamiliar environments. They are more open to interacting with strangers and tend to develop friendships more easily (Bowlby, 1958). Children with insecure attachments tend to cry frequently and may display anxiety when separated from the caregiver (Shamir-Essakow, Ungerer, & Rapee, 2005). These children may experience behavioural and emotional problems, could display high anxiety and behavioural inhibition, and often have

mothers who are anxious (Stevenson-Hinde et al., 2011). This was confirmed by Stevenson-Hinde et al. (2011), who explored the relationship between mothers' anxiety levels, insecure attachment and behavioural inhibition among children aged 4 years and 6 months. The study concluded that those children with the highest anxiety levels were those who were insecurely attached to anxious mothers and who were behaviourally inhibited (Stevenson-Hinde et al., 2011). Behaviourally inhibited children are less inclined to explore novel settings, tend to display fewer self-regulation strategies, and are often rejected by the peer group (Brumariu & Kerns, 2010; Coplan et al., 2008; Rubin et al., 2009; Sroufe, Carlson, & Shulman, 1993).

Attachment appears to impact the characteristics that children display such as social confidence versus withdrawal (Bowlby, 1958). These characteristics may impact preschoolers' potential to establish friendships. Securely attached children who tend to be confident and prosocial are more likely to develop friendships (Bowlby, 1958). It is thought that efforts to promote sensitive parenting may improve parent-child attachment and contribute to preschoolers' healthy emotional and social development (Shamir-Essakow et al., 2005).

3.4.2. Allport's intergroup conflict theory.

Allport (1954) devised the intergroup conflict theory. This may be particularly important to consider when discussing friendships within a South African context, which could encompass intergroup conflict stemming from Apartheid. Allport (1954) suggested that intergroup contact reduces prejudice between groups and increases liking. The greater the proximity between individuals from diverse groups, the more likely they are understood to interact with one another, understand each other and develop a sense of liking or fondness for one another (Pettigrew et al., 2011). Although the South African Apartheid regime ended in 1994, discriminatory attitudes prevail. It is important to identify whether, and consider how, these attitudes may impact friendships amongst preschoolers in the South African context.

The preschool sample in the current study was culturally and racially diverse. The diversity is represented by children from the three major ethnic groups in the Western Cape, namely the White, Coloured and Black communities. There existed opportunity for the development of cross-group friendships. Of interest was whether or not race would emerge as a predictor of the preschoolers' best friend nominations. Exenberger (2003) examined the friendship choices of preschoolers from two multi-racial preschools, one in South Africa and one in London, and found that race significantly influenced the friendship choices of black South African preschoolers. The friendship choices of black preschoolers located in London were influenced more by sex (Exenberger, 2003). Further research would need to be conducted in order to determine whether race, as a predictor of South African preschoolers' friendship choices, could be attributed to elevated racial awareness levels stemming from Apartheid. Developmental theorists such as Piaget (1972) argue that it is normal for preschoolers to focus on the most salient characteristics of peers. Moreover, according to Piaget (1972) preschoolers are thought to demonstrate a preference for what is the same rather than for what is different because of the notion of egocentrism, which refers to the inability to view things from others' perspectives. International studies posit that there is little evidence of preschoolers being negative towards other groups and that it is more a case of preferring peers that are similar to them rather than disliking those who are different (Kowalski, 2003).

The establishment of cross-group friendships is important as it may contribute to the development of knowledge regarding different cultures. It may help preschoolers to learn that others may have different practices, ways of comprehending the world and behaving. Settings that allow preschoolers the opportunity to develop cross-group friendships, such as the multi-racial context of the preprimary, preschool and daycare facility in the present study, may promote interaction between groups and be valuable to advancements in preschoolers' social understanding (Allport, 1954).

A few developmental theories from different perspectives, which offer a basis for understanding the development of friendships amongst preschoolers in a South African context, are discussed next. These developmental perspectives may contribute to a better understanding in helping to design interventions aimed at promoting preschoolers' friendships.

3.5. Developmental theories

3.5.1. Bandura's social learning theory.

Bandura's (1977, 1986) social learning theory postulates that children learn vicariously by observing and imitating others such as parents, siblings and teachers, as opposed to the reinforcement or practice of behaviours. It is emphasised that after observing a person perform a specific action and then be rewarded for that action, a child's behaviour may be altered (Bandura, 1977). The child is likely to imitate the observed behaviour in the future (Bandura, 1977). Imitation during early childhood is believed to be common (Williamson, 2015). For example, preschool boys tend to imitate their favourite action heroes, and girls tend to roleplay their mothers during peer interactions.

The modelling of observed behaviours may influence the formation of friendships amongst preschoolers. Particular attention has been given to the modelling of violent behaviours. For example, Conners-Burrow, McKelvey, and Fussel (2011) found that the viewing of violent content in movies was related to high hyperactivity and aggressive scores amongst 92 preschoolers aged 4 to 6 years. Hyperactive and aggressive preschoolers tend to be rejected by peers who find them to be disruptive (Christakis & Zimmerman, 2007; Conners-Burrow et al., 2011; Mikami et al., 2013). Peer rejection may manifest numerous negative consequences for preschoolers such as the development of psychological problems including depression or anxiety disorders (Ladd, 2006). It is important that parents monitor what children are exposed to. They should encourage preschoolers to watch television characters that practice

prosocial behaviours. This may foster the modelling of favourable behaviours and promote preschoolers' development of healthy social ties.

3.5.2. Piaget's cognitive developmental theory.

Cognitive developmental theorist, Piaget (1971, 1972), provided a theory about how children come to comprehend their world through four different phases of cognitive processing. The second phase, the preoperational phase, involving children aged 2 to 7 years, is relevant to the preschoolers in the present study. In this phase, children are understood to formulate ideas and thoughts regarding the objects around them, their language seems to mature and their imagination is thought to develop (Louw & Louw, 2014). They may demonstrate intelligence through the use of symbols and engage in symbolic play, which is considered to be central to preschool friendships (Gmitrova et al., 2009). According to Piaget (1972), the principle cognitive development during the preoperational phase is symbolic or mental representation. Three types of representation are thought to exist, namely deferred imitation, symbolic play and spoken language, which are described in Louw and Louw (2014).

Deferred imitation refers to the ability to replicate the behaviour of a model that is not present (Louw & Louw, 2014). It may include improvisations and roleplaying, which are usually evident by the ages of 2 to 3 years (Gmitrova et al., 2009). For example, a child may roleplay his or her mother baking a cake during fantasy play with peers. In this scenario, deferred imitation appears to facilitate play. As children imitate new behaviours, they can create novel games. These games may be experienced by peers as exciting. According to Parker and Gottman (1989), the maximisation of excitement and entertainment has long been regarded as a principle theme of preschoolers' friendships. Preschoolers have been found to select as friends those who are perceived to be entertaining play partners (Findlay et al., 2006). Therefore, preschoolers' use of deferred imitation to engage in play may increase their likelihood of being nominated by peers as friends.

Likewise, *symbolic play* (also known as ‘pretend play’) involves the substitution of imaginary situations for real ones and may encourage excitement and diversity in preschoolers’ games (Louw & Louw, 2014, p. 158). For example, during symbolic play, preschoolers may pretend that building blocks are phones that they can use to call the police to help arrest a robber. Hoyte, Torr, and Degotardi (2014), who performed a study on three Australian boys aged between 5 and 6 years, found that the preschool boys’ imaginary play was associated with exciting and rewarding experiences. Those who engage in this type of play may be perceived to be attractive play partners, since symbolic play, driven by imagination, may lead to the formation of unique and exciting games (Findlay et al., 2006; Hoyte et al., 2014). Again, as entertaining play partners, these preschoolers are likely to be chosen as friends (Findlay et al., 2006).

The third representation is *spoken language*, which Piaget considers to be the most noticeable development during the preoperational phase (Louw & Louw, 2014). Children’s vocabulary is thought to expand rapidly between the ages of 3 and 6 years (Louw & Louw, 2014). At 4 to 5 years, they are believed to use more complex sentences and tend to tie sentences together to convey stories (Louw & Louw, 2014). Children’s sentences are thought to sound much like adults’ by the ages of 5 to 7 years (Louw & Louw, 2014). These improvements typically allow preschoolers to converse more fluently and comprehensively with peers, which may promote their development of friendships (Louw & Louw, 2014). They may be better able to explain themselves to peers if misunderstood, and may clarify game rules and convey instructions more effectively (Louw & Louw, 2014). This may contribute positively to their play as there may be a better understanding amongst them (Louw & Louw, 2014).

In addition, advancements in social speech, defined as “speech intended to be understood by the listener”, are suggested to take place during the preoperational phase (Louw

& Louw, 2014, p. 175). Social speech is believed to develop in combination with the development of theory of mind, defined as “a set of opinions constructed by a child (and adult) to explain other people’s ideas, beliefs, desires and behaviour” (Louw & Louw, 2014, p. 164). Preschoolers develop an understanding of others’ emotions and thoughts, and in combination with increased language proficiencies, they may be better able to adjust their conversations to fit the perspectives of their peers (Louw & Louw, 2014). This may encourage them to respond in an appropriate manner and elevate their likability. The ability to understand the perspectives of others in conflictual contexts and to respond appropriately may help reduce peer conflict (Louw & Louw, 2014). Preschoolers who are able to resolve conflict tend to be more successful in their friendships, and may be nominated as friends more often than those who are not able to do so (Salvas et al., 2014).

Although there are great improvements in children’s cognitive abilities during the preoperational phase, there are also five predominant weaknesses. These are related to the illogical thinking that characterises the preoperational phase termed ‘preoperational thinking’ (Louw & Louw, 2014, p. 158). The five main impediments to logical thinking are perceptual centration, egocentrism, animism, transductive reasoning and irreversibility.

The first impediment to logical thinking is *perceptual centration*. This refers to the tendency of children to focus on the most salient aspects and to ignore any additional characteristics (Louw & Louw, 2014). Children occupying the preoperational phase are not able to take into consideration all the facets of a stimulus (Piaget, 1972). This has been referred to in literature that states that preschoolers tend to choose friends according to the most obvious and tangible characteristics and features, such as physical appearance, propinquity and shared play (Furman & Bierman, 1983).

A second weakness of preoperational thought is *egocentrism*, referred to as the inability to view things from the perspectives of others (Louw & Louw, 2014). Egocentric preschoolers

do not understand that others may have perspectives that differ from their own. They may disrupt activity, struggling to understand the reasoning behind their classmates' behaviour and opinions (Huyder & Nilsen, 2012). Thus, egocentrism may be a principle cause of conflict amongst preschoolers. Those who manifest more advanced cognitive abilities, including reciprocal thought, are better able to understand others' perspectives and behaviour, and engage accordingly (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2007). These preschoolers are often better liked in comparison to those who are egocentric (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2007). Moreover, egocentrism may explain why preschoolers tend to have a preference for, and select as friends, those who are similar to them in terms of tastes and interests, for example (Rekalidou & Petrogiannis, 2012). It may be easier for them to understand those who are like them as opposed to those who are different.

Animistic thinking constitutes the third impairment to logical thinking. This is the tendency of young children to assume that non-living objects have thoughts, feelings and motives (Louw & Louw, 2014). Animistic thinking may be present in preschoolers' play. For example, girls may believe that their play dolls can hear them and use language carefully to avoid hurting their dolls' feelings. This shared animistic thinking may contribute to the creation of preschoolers' games such as "mommy-mommy". These games can promote preschoolers' interactions and the development of friendships amongst them.

The fourth immaturity to logical thinking is *transductive reasoning*. This is when children may "reason from one particular instance to another, linking two events that occur close together in a cause-and-effect fashion- whether it is logical or not" (Louw & Louw, 2014, p. 160). This may either hinder or promote preschool friendships. For example, a negative event with one peer may be transferred to another, causing the preschooler to assume that the second peer may have negative intentions when this is not the case. This may disrupt the development of friendships. Contrastingly, the opposite may occur, where a preschooler may transfer a

positive event that happened with one peer to another peer, viewing the second peer through a positive lens and embracing the possibility of friendship with that peer. *Irreversibility*, when children cannot reverse operations, constitutes the last impairment to logical thinking (Louw & Louw, 2014). This does not appear to have a noticeable impact on friendship development amongst preschoolers. The above four impairments may have a greater effect.

Piaget's (1971, 1972) cognitive developmental theory may assist in understanding the cognitive processes that could impact preschoolers' friendships. The improvements in cognitive abilities during the preoperational phase, including deferred imitation, symbolic play and spoken language, may contribute significantly to the development of preschoolers' friendships. Moreover, four out of the five impairments to logical thinking are understood to influence preschool friendships in either a positive or negative way. These are perceptual centration, egocentrism, animistic thinking and transductive reasoning.

3.5.3. Erikson's psychosocial developmental theory.

Erikson's (1959) psychosocial developmental theory postulates that development occurs through a series of phases, and that children contribute to their development through their ability to acclimatise to their environment. Erikson (1959) divided the life cycle into eight stages, and stated that each stage involves accomplishing certain tasks and gaining competence in an area of life. In every stage, children confront a psychosocial conflict that needs to be overcome in order to progress to the next stage (Erikson, 1959). Overcoming this conflict is believed to be associated with a turning point in development where the potential for personal growth is raised. Children need to resolve the psychosocial conflict in each stage in order to reach optimal development throughout their lives (Erikson, 1959).

The second life stage of Erikson's (1959) psychosocial developmental theory involves children aged 18 months to 3 years. At this age, children are thought to confront the

psychosocial conflict of *autonomy versus shame and doubt* and they are expected to develop a sense of self-control (Erikson, 1959). The central task during this period is imitation (Erikson, 1959). Through imitation, children learn skills and tasks essential to life and gain a sense of autonomy and competence as a result (Erikson, 1959). Imitation of peers has been found to be particularly common amongst children older than 3 years, and has been revealed in their play with friends (Werebe & Baudonniere, 1988; Williamson, 2015). For example, Goldstein et al. (1989), who performed an international study involving 24 children aged 2 to 5 years, found that friend dyads showed a greater amount of imitation as opposed to acquaintance dyads. It could be assumed that imitation may be important to children older than 3 years, to their friendships and to their development. Thus, the psychosocial conflict of autonomy versus shame and doubt may still be relevant to preschoolers (4 to 6 years) who may imitate friends during play, and learn new skills that may contribute to the development of social competence and autonomy.

In the third stage of life, children aged 3 to 5 years confront the psychosocial conflict of *initiative versus guilt* (Erikson, 1959). At this age, children are expected to resolve the conflict between exploring their environment and trying new things thus developing initiative, whilst being aware that their actions will have an impact on both themselves and on others (Erikson, 1959). They are expected to learn to regulate their inquisitiveness while gaining the ability to interpret others' emotions and to react accordingly (Erikson, 1959). They should take charge in peer interactions and be able to plan activities (Erikson, 1959). Those who are successful in these tasks are thought to develop initiative, autonomy and independence (Erikson, 1959). They are believed to be more successful in social settings and may find it easier to establish friendships (Erikson, 1959). Those who are unsuccessful develop a sense of guilt and self-doubt, and tend to lack initiative (Erikson, 1959). They may prefer to play alone or in small groups due to a low self-esteem. An unresolved conflict might lead, for example, to

the development of anxiety disorders (Erikson, 1959). Anxious preschoolers, who may be behaviourally inhibited (Howard et al., 2016), may be less likely to develop friendships.

3.6. Chapter summary

Chapter 3 discussed the theoretical framework for the current study and presented relevant theories that explain friendship development amongst preschoolers. The contextual perspective included Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979) ecological systems theory. The social perspective included Bowlby's (1958) attachment theory and Allport's (1954) theory of intergroup conflict. The chapter was concluded with an overview of developmental theories including Bandura's (1977, 1986) social learning theory, Piaget's (1971, 1972) cognitive developmental theory, and Erikson's (1959) psychosocial developmental theory. In the following chapter, the research methodology of the present study will be discussed.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research method and procedures used in the current study.

4.1. Introduction

The study comprised two aims: firstly, to identify the factors that influenced preschoolers' nominations as a best friend, and secondly, to assess whether there were any distinguishing characteristics amongst preschoolers receiving more peer nominations (high peer status preschoolers) compared to those receiving fewer peer nominations (low peer status preschoolers).

The methodology used to obtain the information to address these aims is discussed below. This includes a discussion of the research design, the participants, the measuring instruments used, the procedures employed to collect the data and conduct the analyses, as well as the ethical considerations and procedures related to the study.

4.2. Research design

The present study was based on archival data obtained from semi-structured interviews conducted with 58 preschoolers (aged 4 to 6 years) from a preprimary, preschool and daycare facility in Stellenbosch in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. The data were obtained as part of a Child Psychology assignment in the Psychology Honours program at Stellenbosch University under the supervision of Prof Loxton for an ongoing community interaction project entitled *Preschoolers and Honours Psychology Students: Promoting Positive Interaction* (Loxton & Hugo, 2014). This took place in March 2015 and was conducted by 26 Honours students in the Psychology Honours program. Since the data used in the present study were previously obtained and stored, the researcher refers to the data as archival data. The archival

data were collected qualitatively by means of child-friendly individual semi-structured interviews and drawing activities (see Appendix A).

As a qualitative research design is both explorative and descriptive in nature, it was used in the present study to answer the “whys” and “hows” of human behaviour, opinion and experience (Bless, Higson-Smith, & Sithole, 2013). This was done by exploring the subjective experiences and perceptions of individuals in a naturalistic setting (Bless et al., 2013), namely conversing with preschoolers to understand their best friendships at the preprimary, preschool and daycare facility. Studies regarding friendship amongst preschoolers within a South African context appear to be scarce and for this reason the exploratory nature was incorporated.

4.3. Qualitative measures

The archival data consisted of information obtained via child-friendly, individual semi-structured interviews with 58 preschoolers according to a semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix A). For this study, only archival data for the following questions were analysed:

- Who is your best friend? (see Appendix A, question number 2)
- Why is X your best friend? (see Appendix A, question number 3)
- Do you have other friends? (see Appendix A, question number 4)
- What are their names? (see Appendix A, question number 6)

Child-friendly, individual semi-structured interviews appear to be the most efficient means of gaining insight into preschoolers’ subjective experiences as the open-ended format is thought to allow for their own free response (Loxton, 2009). The interviews in the present study included a friendship nomination procedure in which children were asked to verbally identify their best friend. The friendship nomination procedure is considered to be one of the most successful measures that can be used with preschoolers (see Eivers et al., 2012; Rekalidou & Petrogiannis, 2012; Shin et al., 2014), as it adds an important, subjective dimension to

understanding early friendships, honouring the preschoolers' developmental capacity to report their own ideas, opinions and experiences (Eivers et al., 2012). In this study, each child-friendly, individual semi-structured interview commenced by asking the preschooler to draw his or her best friend for the purpose of formulating rapport and to allow the preschooler to feel at ease.

4.4. Participants

Archival data were collected from 72 preschoolers, 38 girls and 34 boys, aged between 4 and 6 years enrolled at a preprimary, preschool and daycare facility in Stellenbosch in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. Parental and guardian consent was sought to use the archival data, and was obtained for 58 of the total 72 preschoolers (see Appendix E). The 14 preschoolers who did not receive parental and guardian consent were excluded from the study, therefore the study had a total of 58 preschool participants (please see *Ethical considerations and procedures* for more information).

Of the sample of 58 preschoolers, 24 were boys (41.38%) and 34 were girls (58.62%). The preschoolers' ages ranged from 4 to 6 years with a mean age of 4.72 years. The preschoolers comprised two age groups, namely a group aged 4 years to 4 years and 11 months, and a group aged 5 years to 5 years and 11 months. The first age group (4y0m to 4y11m) included 32 preschoolers (55.17%) comprising the Pre-Grade R class at the preprimary, preschool and daycare facility. The second age group (5y0m to 5y11m) consisted of 26 preschoolers (44.83%) comprising the Grade R class at the preprimary, preschool and daycare facility. The demographic characteristics of the preschool sample are presented in Table 1.

The 58 preschoolers were representative of the population of preschoolers who attended the preprimary, preschool and daycare facility in Stellenbosch. They represented a variety of cultural backgrounds and languages from three major ethnic groups in the Western Cape,

namely the White, Coloured and Black communities. The preprimary, preschool and daycare facility that participated in this study uses either English or Afrikaans as the medium of instruction depending on the choice of the parents. Although there were children with other home languages such as Xhosa, all children could speak either English or Afrikaans. Of the preschoolers involved in this study, 43 were instructed in English and 15 were instructed in Afrikaans. The preschoolers' socio-economic backgrounds differed significantly, ranging from very low to high, and was largely indicated by the preschoolers' housing. The housing ranged from informal settlements without running water and electricity to privately-owned, well-established properties with both of these amenities. These details could not be stated for individual preschoolers due to ethical reasons. However, the gender, age and class group (Pre-Grade R and Grade R) parameters of the final sample could be defined (please see Table 1 below).

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample of Preschoolers (N=58)

Total Sample			Percentage
Gender:	Boys	24	41.38
	Girls	34	58.62
Age:	4y0m to 4y11m	32	55.17
	5y0m to 5y11m	26	44.83
Class group:	Pre-Grade R	32	55.17
	Grade R	26	44.83

4.5. Procedure

As part of the Child Psychology 778 Module in 2015 offered at the University of Stellenbosch, 26 Honours students conducted child-friendly, individual semi-structured interviews with allocated preschoolers (see Appendix A) for an ongoing community interaction project (Loxton & Hugo, 2014) (archived data). This project was a supervised programme of service-learning which constituted a formal credit-bearing component of the Child Psychology 778 Module, and offered Honours students the opportunity to integrate theory and practice (Loxton & Hugo, 2014).

Prior to conducting the individual semi-structured interviews the Honours students completed a theoretical and practical training component of the Child Psychology 778 Module, to learn the core essentials of the interview procedure such as child-friendliness. After signing confidentiality forms during a carefully supervised procedure by the preprimary, preschool and daycare facility and Prof Loxton, the students were allocated to individual preschoolers that were matched as far as possible on the basis of language of instruction (either English or Afrikaans). As part of the child-friendly nature of the project and to ensure that the preschoolers felt at ease, the playground of the preprimary, preschool and daycare facility, being familiar to the preschoolers, was chosen as the setting for the interviews. Individual slots of approximately 90 minutes were scheduled for each student and child dyad. These slots coincided with the preprimary, preschool and daycare facility's allocated time for free play. Free play was encouraged throughout the interview process to ensure a child-friendly atmosphere.

Each student was introduced to their allocated preschooler by the principal. All interviews were conducted according to a set interview schedule (see Appendix A), which began with a child-friendly conversation to ensure a non-threatening atmosphere. The students gradually introduced the individual semi-structured interviews by means of asking the preschoolers if they would like to draw a picture of their best friend. Thereafter, the

preschoolers were asked to name their best friend and to explain why the peer was nominated as a best friend. The preschoolers were also asked to name any other friends that they had. The interviews were concluded with a story component where the preschoolers were asked to tell their favourite story. This was done to ensure child-friendliness.

All 72 preschoolers were able to play freely and engage with their allocated student for the duration of their scheduled 90 minute slot. The students took notes regarding the preschoolers' responses and submitted an assignment on the experience for the Child Psychology 778 Module. This information constituted the archival data, which were securely stored under the supervision of Prof Loxton, and were analysed for the purpose of this study.

4.6. Data analysis

The data for the two research questions pertaining to the factors that influenced preschoolers' nominations as a best friend, and whether there were any distinguishing characteristics amongst preschoolers receiving more peer nominations (high peer status preschoolers) compared to those receiving fewer peer nominations (low peer status preschoolers), were analysed by means of content analysis. Content analysis is a systematic and objective means of describing and quantifying phenomena (Krippendorff, 1989). It is employed in the methodical analysis of human communications concerned with manifest content as well as the core themes found in the communication (Mayring, 2000). It is a replicable technique for compressing words into fewer content categories based on the rules of coding, and for performing word frequency counts to identify themes of importance (Berelson, 1952).

Firstly, content analysis was used to analyse the archival data for the first research question, whereby the reasons preschoolers provided for nominating a peer as a best friend were coded for themed meaning units (Krippendorff, 1989). The meaning units were coded

into deductively generated best friend nomination themes and sub-themes derived from prior theory and research on the criteria preschoolers use to nominate peers as friends (e.g. Eivers et al., 2012; Field et al., 1994; Lindsey, 2014; Piaget, 1972; Rekalidou & Petrogiannis, 2012; Sachkova, 2014; Sanefuji, 2013). While the majority of the coding was based on pre-existing theory, the researcher found that some archival data did not fall into the deductive sub-themes. Seven novel best friend nomination sub-themes were created following the principles of inductive content analysis (Krippendorff, 1989). The aim was to identify themes and sub-themes that both summarised the content found in data set and highlighted key content (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Weber, 1990). In this way, the factors that influenced preschoolers' nominations as a best friend were identified. Following the in-depth analysis of the archival data and an analysis performed independently by another researcher, five best friend nomination themes and 14 best friend nomination sub-themes were determined.

The meaning units comprising each best friend nomination sub-theme were counted in order to determine the frequency of responses for each sub-theme, as well as to determine the frequency of responses for the best friend nomination themes to which the sub-themes belonged. The rank order of the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes according to frequency of responses could then be determined. Thereafter, whether there were any significant differences in the frequency of responses for the themes and sub-themes according to gender and class group was calculated using the statistical package Statistica. A two-tailed t-test was used as the statistical technique to undertake the group comparisons. An alpha level of .05 was set in order to minimise the risk of making a Type-1 error.

Each preschooler's peer status was analysed by means of counting the number of "best friend" and "other friend" peer nominations received by each preschooler by hand. A point system was employed, whereby each "best friend" nomination a preschooler received counted two points and an "other friend" nomination counted one point. A total "all friend" score was

calculated for each preschooler by adding the preschooler's best friend and other friend scores. This score was used as the preschooler's peer status score. It is important to note that some of the preschoolers nominated peers at the preprimary, preschool and daycare facility who had not received parental/guardian consent to be included in this study as a best friend or other friend. These 14 non-consented preschoolers received a peer status score and were included for the purpose of the second research question. However, as parental consent had not been obtained, no archival data belonging to the 14 preschoolers were used. This may be considered a limitation of the study as the peer status scores for the consented 58 preschoolers excluded nominations given by the 14 non-consented preschoolers. To conclude, the total initial population of 72 preschoolers received a peer status score.

The 72 preschoolers were distinguished into two peer status categories, namely high peer status and low peer status, based on their peer status score. The peer status median score was calculated in order to distinguish between low peer status and high peer status preschoolers. The peer status median score was determined to be 5. Preschoolers who obtained a peer status score of 5 and above were categorised within the high peer status category (N= 42). Those who obtained a peer status score between 0 and 4 (below the peer status median score) were categorised within the low peer status category (N= 30). Statistica was used to determine significant differences in the frequency of responses for the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes between the two peer status groups. A two-tailed t-test was used as the statistical technique to undertake these group comparisons and an alpha level of .05 was set.

Content analysis was used to explore for any potential differences in the best friend nomination sub-theme content between high peer status and low peer status preschoolers. In this way, whether there were any differentiating characteristics between the peer status groups could be determined.

4.7. Trustworthiness

The criteria given by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used in order to ensure the reliability of the research methodology. Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasise the importance of *trustworthiness*. Trustworthiness consists of four categories: (1) credibility (confidence that there is “truth” in the results), (2) transferability (showing that the results are applicable to other contexts), (3) dependability (showing that the analysis is consistent), (4) and confirmability (the extent to which the results are based on or shaped by the reality of the participants and not researcher bias) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Firstly, lengthy engagement in the field has been suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to ensure the credibility of the data. In the present study, each interviewer (Honours student) spent 90 minutes with an allocated preschooler. This allowed the preschooler sufficient time to adjust to the interviewer, to feel comfortable and to gain trust so that he or she would speak freely with the interviewer.

Secondly, in terms of transferability, as much information as possible was given into the parameters and nature of the participant sample. This was done with the purpose of informing the reader about the degree of generalisability of the present study’s results. Unfortunately, detailed background information on preschoolers could not be obtained due to the nature of the archival data and for ethical reasons of confidentiality. However, a comprehensive discussion of the results was presented with the purpose of assisting the reader to conclude whether the results could be generalised to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thirdly, in addressing dependability, the researcher’s lengthy engagement in data analysis and steps taken to analyse the archival data were reported.

Finally, in terms of confirmability, preschoolers’ verbatim responses were included to confirm the validity of the themes and sub-themes. Yardley (2008) suggests that raw data

should be linked to the final paper to promote confirmability. This may justify that the study was conducted in a vigilant way (Yardley, 2008). In addition, the analysis was performed for a second time by a Masters Research Psychology graduate to ensure sound interpretation of the archival data. After cross-checking the themes and sub-themes that were independently derived, discussion took place and the final themes and sub-themes were concluded. Lastly, the research methodology and data analysis procedure were discussed on repeated occasions with the research supervisor, which helped to minimise researcher bias.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Yardley (2008) suggest that reflexivity is also important to trustworthiness. In qualitative research, the researcher is essentially the dominant instrument, whose perspectives will shape the research process (Yardley, 2008). In light of this, the researcher was sure to reflect on how she impacted the analysis of the archival data. In particular, she was aware that she was a different age to the preschoolers and that she had a different cultural background to many of them considering the diversity inherent in the sample. This may have led to the researcher's interpretation of archival data in a slightly different way than that which was intended by the preschoolers. A reflexive journal was kept where thoughts, opinions and reasoning throughout the data analysis process were documented. This allowed the researcher to continually reflect upon and question these.

4.8. Ethical considerations and procedures

Ethical clearance to perform a secondary data analysis of the archival data was sought and obtained prior to starting the study. Firstly, preliminary written permission to use the archival data from the preprimary, preschool and daycare facility of interest was obtained (see Appendix B). The supervisors of the study, Prof Loxton and Dr Swart, obtained ethics clearance from the Research Ethics Committee (Humanities) at Stellenbosch University for the study as part of a broader project (Protocol number SU-HSD-001725) (see Appendix C). Upon approval of the research, the parents/guardians of the preschoolers were informed of the nature,

content and purpose of the study (see Appendix D). Retrospective written informed consent to use the archival data was sought and obtained from the parents/guardians of the preschoolers (see Appendix E). Parental/guardian consent to use the archival data for the purpose of this study was obtained for 58 of the total 72 preschoolers interviewed.

The anonymity and confidentiality of the archival data was ensured. The study made use of participant numbers (e.g. “Part. 48”) to ensure the anonymity of participants. “Part.” was used as an abbreviation for “Participant”. The letter “G” was used to identify girls and “B” to identify boys. The abbreviation “GR” was used to identify preschoolers who comprised the Grade R class group and “PGR” was used to identify those who comprised the Pre-Grade R class group. The archival data were only made accessible to the research supervisor, co-supervisor and researcher, and were stored electronically by the supervisor and were password protected. Hard copies of the archival data were securely stored under the supervision of Prof Loxton (research supervisor) in the Department of Psychology at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa.

4.9. Chapter summary

In this chapter, a brief introduction to the aims of the study was given and the research design was discussed thereafter. A discussion of the qualitative measures employed to collect the data followed. The demographic information pertaining to the participants was discussed and displayed in Table 1, and the procedure and data analysis were subsequently addressed. The researcher then gave insight into the efforts employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the results, and concluded the chapter with the ethical considerations and procedures that were taken into account for the present study. The next chapter will present the results of the study.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter the results of the study relating to the study's two research questions, namely what factors influenced preschoolers' nominations as a best friend, and whether there were any distinguishing characteristics amongst preschoolers receiving more peer nominations (high peer status preschoolers) compared to those receiving fewer peer nominations (low peer status preschoolers) are presented. The chapter begins with presenting the demographic characteristics of the sample of parent-consented preschoolers involved in the study (N= 58) (see Table 1). Thereafter, the first research question is addressed.

Firstly, the five best friend nomination themes according to which the preschoolers were found to be nominated as best friends and theme rank orders are displayed in a quantitative manner (see Table 2). The 14 best friend nomination sub-themes identified and sub-theme rank orders are displayed in a quantitative manner thereafter (see Table 3). Examples of verbatim responses are included in Table 3 to confirm the credibility and validity of the sub-themes and broader themes. Insight into each theme is then provided by exploring the relevant sub-themes in a qualitative manner.

Following this, the frequency of responses for the five best friend nomination themes and 14 best friend nomination sub-themes are displayed according to gender and analysed for significant gender differences (see Tables 4 and 5). Thereafter, the frequency of responses for the five best friend nomination themes and 14 best friend nomination sub-themes are displayed according to class groups and analysed for significant class group differences (see Tables 6 and 7).

The second research question is then addressed. The frequency of responses for the five best friend nomination themes and theme rank orders are displayed according to peer status and analysed for significant differences between the two peer status groups (see Table 8). In the same way, the frequency of responses for the 14 best friend nomination sub-themes and sub-theme rank orders are displayed according to peer status and analysed for significant differences between the two peer status groups (see Table 9). Thereafter, differences in the content of the best friend nomination sub-themes between the peer status groups are explored.

5.2. Demographic characteristics of the sample

The demographic characteristics of the final sample of 58 preschoolers that were included in the present study are provided for the purposes of ensuring clarity. The sample included 34 girls (58.62%) and 24 boys (41.38%). The preschoolers' ages ranged from 4 years to 5 years and 11 months, with a mean age of 4.72 years. The final sample was further divided into two age-groups. The first age-group included preschoolers aged 4 years to 4 years and 11 months ($N = 32$). These preschoolers comprised the Pre-Grade R class group at the preprimary, preschool and daycare facility in Stellenbosch. The second age-group included preschoolers aged 5 years to 5 years and 11 months ($N = 26$). These preschoolers comprised the Grade R class group at the preprimary, preschool and daycare facility in Stellenbosch. The demographic characteristics of the preschool sample are presented in Table 1 in Chapter 4.

5.3. Best friend nomination themes and sub-themes

In this section the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes are presented (see Tables 2 and 3). The best friend nomination theme and sub-theme rank orders are displayed according to the frequency of responses ($n = 203$) found for the total sample of preschoolers ($N = 58$) (see Tables 2 and 3). Thereafter, the content of the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes is presented. Insight is provided into preschoolers' verbatim responses. Following

this, the frequency of responses for the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes are displayed according to gender and analysed for significant gender differences (see Tables 4 and 5). The frequency of responses for the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes are displayed according to class group thereafter and analysed for significant class group differences (see Tables 6 and 7).

5.3.1. Best friend nomination theme rank orders.

The five best friend nomination themes that were found to influence the preschoolers' nominations as a best friend are presented in Table 2 below. The frequency of responses for the five themes and theme rank orders are displayed. In addition, the percentage of the number of references made to each best friend nomination theme relative to the total number of responses ($n = 203$) by the sample ($N = 58$) is indicated. Arranged in rank order the five best friend nomination themes were *Personal characteristics and psychological attributes* (37.44%), *Play and shared activities* (32.51%), *Geographical associations* (11.33%), *Similarity amongst preschoolers* (11.33%), and *General fondness* (7.39%).

Table 2

Frequency of Responses (f) for Best Friend Nomination Themes and Theme Rank Orders for the Total Sample (N = 58)

Theme	Total Responses ($n = 203$)		
	f	%	Rank Order
Personal characteristics and psychological attributes	76	37.44	1
Play and shared activities	66	32.51	2
Geographical associations	23	11.33	3
Similarity amongst preschoolers	23	11.33	3
General fondness	15	7.39	5

5.3.2. Best friend nomination sub-theme rank orders.

The 14 best friend nomination sub-themes comprising the five themes are displayed in Table 3 below. The frequency of responses for the 14 sub-themes and sub-theme rank orders are presented. In addition, the percentage of the number of references made to each best friend nomination sub-theme relative to the total number of responses ($n = 203$) by the sample ($N = 58$) is indicated. Verbatim responses are included to confirm the credibility and validity of the sub-themes and broader themes. It is important to note that the theme *General Fondness* did not comprise any sub-themes.

Table 3

Frequency of Responses (f) for Best Friend Nomination Sub-themes and Sub-theme Rank Orders for the Total Sample (N = 58)

Theme	Sub-theme	Total Responses (n = 203)			Examples of verbatim responses
		f	%	Rank Order	
Personal characteristics and psychological attributes	Socially positive traits and behaviour	55	27.09	1	<p>“She is my best friend because she shares her food with me. We also put each other's jackets on each other when we get cold.”</p> <p>“She gives me an Easter egg. She is a kind girl.”</p> <p>“Because he tickles me and makes jokes and laughs with me. He is funny.”</p>
	Gender attributes	11	5.42	5	<p>“Also a girl.”</p> <p>“Only like girls. Boys want to kiss girls. That’s disgusting.”</p> <p>“All boys are rude to me. I prefer to play with girls.”</p>
	Physical attractiveness	10	4.93	7	<p>“She has pretty clothes. She wears a pretty t-shirt, a princess one and I like princesses.”</p> <p>“Because he rolls the tyres and he is strong. I want to be strong like him. He is big.”</p>
Play and shared activities	Shared specific play	28	13.79	2	<p>“Play on the jungle gym together.”</p> <p>“We enjoy rolling tyres together.”</p> <p>“We play the same games.”</p>
	General play	18	8.87	3	<p>“We play together.”</p> <p>“We play nicely together.”</p> <p>“I like to play with her.”</p>
	Dedicated play	11	5.42	5	<p>“Play with him every day.”</p> <p>“She plays with me the whole day.”</p> <p>“He only plays with me.”</p>
	Imitation and skills development	9	4.43	9	<p>“He copies me when we draw.”</p> <p>“X taught me to be brave and hand upside down on the jungle.”</p> <p>“X taught me how to do a flip jump. She taught me to also go left.”</p>

Table 3 continued

Frequency of Responses (f) for Best Friend Nomination Sub-themes and Sub-theme Rank Orders for the Total Sample (N = 58)

Theme	Sub-theme	Total Responses (n = 203)			Examples of verbatim responses
		f	%	Rank Order	
Geographical associations	Out-of-school interaction	10	4.93	7	“She goes to my house and I go to her house.” “Slept at her house.” “We can play with each other also after school for longer.”
	Propinquity	8	3.94	10	“Because we live by each other.” “We in the same class.” “We sit together.”
	Familial influence	5	2.46	11	“My Mommy said I need to play with her because X is being rude to me.” “Sy kom kuier altyd vir my oupa.” [She always comes to visit my grandad]
Similarity amongst preschoolers	Similarity in tastes and interests	18	8.87	3	“She likes to draw and paint and I also like to draw and paint.” “They like the same things as me, like playing my games (hide-and-seek and sandpit toys).”
	Similarity in skills	2	0.99	12	“X kan ook baie mooi inkleur, soos ek.” [X can also colour in very nicely, like me] “Both of us can jungle.”
	Similarity in possessions	2	0.99	12	“Also because she has the same boots like me.” “Because she also gets a sticker for counting numbers.”
	Similarity in physical appearance	1	0.49	14	“Want hy is bruin net soos ek.” [Because he is brown just like me]
General fondness		15	7.39	--	“I like him.” “Because I love her.” “Because she likes me.” “She wants to be my best friend. She loves me.”

5.3.3. Content of best friend nomination themes and sub-themes.

In this section, the content of the five best friend nomination themes and 14 best friend nomination sub-themes found for the total sample of preschoolers ($N = 58$) is addressed in a qualitative way. The themes and related sub-themes will be presented according to the theme rank order as can be seen in Table 2 above. Verbatim responses are included for the purpose of allowing the reader greater insight into the sub-themes and broader themes.

5.3.3.1. Theme One: Personal characteristics and psychological attributes.

Personal characteristics and psychological attributes was the most common theme in the present study and accounted for 37.44% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$). This theme included three sub-themes. Arranged in rank order in terms of frequency of responses these were *Socially positive traits and behaviour* (27.09%), *Gender attributes* (5.42%), and *Physical attractiveness* (4.93%).

Socially positive traits and behaviour.

Socially positive traits and behaviour, mentioned within 27.09% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$), was the most frequently reported sub-theme out of the total 14 sub-themes identified in this study. Those preschoolers who shared objects, who willingly took turns during activities, who were altruistic, kind, helpful and caring, and who had a good sense of humour were selected as best friends.

“*He is nice to me*” (Part. 46, B, PGR) and “*She is loving*” (Part. 51, G, PGR) were frequent responses that demonstrated the importance of including a sub-theme related to preschoolers’ socially positive traits and behaviour in the present study. Those preschoolers who were friendly and who displayed warmth towards others tended to be nominated as best friends. Other responses included in this sub-theme were “*because she helps me to play*” (Part. 50, G, PGR) and “*she helps me to bake cakes and also pink muffins*” (Part. 58, G, PGR).

Helpfulness and care were two intertwined and re-occurring qualities that preschoolers appeared to recognise in their peers and appreciated. This finding illustrated the potential of preschoolers to be vigilant of and sensitive to the needs of others, and to show genuine care and sympathy for their peers.

The acts of sharing and giving were also highlighted by preschoolers when nominating peers as best friends. Examples of these included “*X shares with me their tyres*” (Part. 6, B, GR), “*share snacks*” (Part. 18, B, GR) and “*X gives me an Easter egg. She is a kind girl*” (Part. 8, G, GR). Preschoolers’ abilities to share items in their possession was found to be an attractive quality to peers. The last example response displays preschoolers’ associations between sharing and kindness. Preschoolers who shared items were understood to be kind and were thus favoured as best friends. Furthermore, preschoolers who were perceived to treat peers as equals, and who equally divided their attention amongst peers during group activities, were thought to be kind and were consequently nominated as best friends. One response which demonstrated this was “*She counts numbers with all our friends, so she is kind, and so she is my best friend*” (Part. 37, G, PGR).

In addition, attention was attributed to preschoolers’ turn taking and mindful, cooperative collaboration with peers. For example “*We take turns*” (Part. 54, G, PGR) and “*Take turns when we play*” (Part. 38, B, PGR). Preschoolers who were polite, hospitable and who encouraged fair participation during play were nominated as best friends. Those preschoolers who were approachable, accepting and responsive were favoured as best friends. For example, a preschooler gave the reason “*X se elke dag ja as ek vra om saam met haar te speel*” [*X says yes every day when I ask if I can play with her*] (Part. 29, G, GR) when explaining why she had selected a peer as her best friend. The peer’s reciprocity was identified by the nominating preschooler and was found to be an attractive quality.

One preschooler drew attention to the protective role that a best friend may play. He stated, “*He has my back. If anybody big hurts me, he will cover me*” (Part. 39, B, PGR). The nominated peer was understood to offer the preschooler a sense of security, certainty and support. A preschooler who may be confident in confronting others in order to protect a peer may be well-liked by that peer and be nominated as a best friend. In the above response a sense of trust in the nominated peer was displayed. The preschooler seemed to trust the nominated peer to protect him in times of need. This finding suggested that trust could be a trait that promotes preschoolers’ best friend nominations.

Preschoolers who displayed a good sense of humour seemed to have positive peer interactions and were likely to be selected by peers as best friends. Those preschoolers who joked, who pulled humorous faces, who laughed and who tickled their peers were favoured as best friends. For example, some of the reasons for nominating a peer as a best friend included “*Because he tickles me and makes jokes and laughs with me*” (Part. 4, G, GR), “*He makes me laugh*” (Part. 6, B, GR), “*Make funny faces at each other with our eyes*” (Part. 63, B, PGR), and “*She always pulls my finger, pulls my leg and plays jokes*” (Part. 41, G, PGR). Many preschoolers emphasised physical humour, for example, “*pulling my leg*” (Part. 41, G, PGR) and “*tickles*” (Part. 4, G, GR). Those preschoolers who were inclined to engage in humorous and affectionate physical contact were found to be attractive peers and were nominated as best friends. Lastly, preschoolers who pronounced words in peculiar ways, manipulating word sounds, were found to be entertaining and were for this reason nominated as best friends. For example, a preschooler selected a peer as a best friend because “*she says funny words*” (Part. 35, G, PGR).

Gender attributes.

Eleven responses given by the preschoolers in the present study highlighted the concept of gender. *Gender attributes* was ranked fifth out of the total 14 sub-themes identified and

accounted for 5.42% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$). Two preschoolers specified that they liked and interacted with both girls and boys after each having selected a girl and a boy as best friends. These responses were “*I like girls and boys*” (Part. 11, B, GR) and “*I also like to play with boys*” (Part. 45, B, PGR). The remaining responses communicated a preference for a single gender.

One preschool boy stated, “*All boys are rude to me. I prefer to play with girls*” (Part. 21, B, GR), which justified his nomination of a girl as a best friend. His response suggested that he may have been exposed to the bullying behaviours of boys in the peer group. It was assumed that the preschooler perceived girls to be more kind and caring, and thus preferred them as play partners and as friends. The response “*If I pretend to be a dog or a cat the girls will be friends with me, because they will love me. The girls only walk with other boys that are bigger. They want big boy friends*” (Part. 39, B, PGR) was of particular interest. This preschooler drew attention to the stereotype of muscular men who girls are assumed to find most attractive. He perceived himself to be physically inept and not liked by girls because of his small stature. Any inclination that the preschooler had towards establishing friendships with girls seemed to be hindered by feelings of inferiority.

The remaining seven responses all illustrated a clear preference for same-gender peers for example “*also a girl*” (Part. 51, G, PGR; Part. 58, G, PGR; Part. 60, G, PGR), “*also a boy*” (Part. 18, B, GR; Part. 62, B, PGR) and “*only friends with boys*” (Part. 63, B, PGR). One preschool girl stated, “*I only like girls. Boys want to kiss girls. That’s disgusting*” (Part. 36, G, PGR). The preschooler observed the romantic gesture of kissing made by the opposite sex to be unpleasant and thus preferred to play with girls where she would not be exposed to this behaviour.

Physical attractiveness.

Some preschoolers referred to certain physical features that they found to be attractive about a peer and communicated these as a reason for nominating the peer as a best friend. *Physical attractiveness* was ranked seventh out of the total 14 sub-themes identified and accounted for 4.93% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$). Examples of this sub-theme are given below.

One preschooler referred to the height of two peers stating, “*X is my small best friend. Y is my big best friend*” (Part. 6, B, GR). The preschooler was thought to have chosen these two peers as best friends based on the appeal of having a short and tall best friend. Another preschooler based his best friend nomination on strength. He stated, “*X rolls the tyres and he is strong. I want to be strong like him. He is big*” (Part. 39, B, PGR). Preschool boys who were physically big seemed to be favoured. A desire to live up to the masculine ideal of being strong and powerful was portrayed by the preschooler’s response above as he articulated his attraction to the nominated best friend’s strength and size.

The preschool girls in this study often employed the word “*pretty*” to describe their best friend and used this as a reason for why they had nominated the peer as a best friend. For example “*She has pretty clothes. She wears a pretty t-shirt*” (Part. 51, G, PGR) and “*X is a pretty girl too*” (Part. 56, G, PGR). Preschool girls who were perceived by their peers to be “*pretty*”, thus attractive, were likely to be nominated by other girls as best friends. Reference was made to either the nominated peer’s appealing clothes or genetic attractiveness.

Girls were found to attribute significant attention to princesses, mermaids and Barbie. For example, one preschooler nominated two girls as her best friends because “*they wore Barbie, princess and mermaid clothes*” (Part. 48, G, PGR). In addition, a preschooler nominated a girl as a best friend because she wore a princess t-shirt. She stated, “*She wears a*

pretty t-shirt, a princess one and I like princesses” (Part. 51, G, PGR). The hype surrounding these characters was apparent throughout the archival data. The girls seemed to have been preoccupied with a recent movie about princesses and mermaids which they had seen. While obsessing over princesses and mermaids, those peers who had worn clothes with these characters imprinted on them were liked and were commonly nominated as best friends.

5.3.3.2. Theme Two: Play and shared activities.

Play and shared activities was found to be the second most common theme that influenced preschoolers’ best friend nominations and accounted for 32.51% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$). *Play and shared activities* was divided into four sub-themes. Arranged in rank order these were *Shared specific play* (13.79%), *General play* (8.87%), *Dedicated play* (5.42%), and *Imitation and skills development* (4.43%).

Shared specific play.

Shared specific play was ranked second out of the total 14 sub-themes identified and accounted for 13.79% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$). Preschoolers tended to nominate as best friends those peers who partook in specific play activities or games which they themselves participated in and enjoyed. The nominated peer appeared to manifest a shared desire to engage in the favoured activities, and his or her participation in these was found to promote peer likeability. Examples included “*Because we play hide-and-seek, on-on, jungle and swing*” (Part. 8, G, GR), “*We enjoy rolling tyres together*” (Part. 25, B, GR), “*I race with him, swing with him and climb with him too*” (Part. 39, B, PGR), and “*we played angry birds together*” (Part. 63, B, PGR).

A response which effectively summarises this sub-theme is “*Because we want to play the same games*” (Part. 18, B, GR). It was evident that the preschooler’s relationship with the nominated peer was centred on specific play activities which they shared an interest in and

participated in together. Those activities that may be favoured by two peers and their engagement in these may set the foundation for best friend nominations and the development of best friendship.

General play.

General play was ranked third out of the total 14 sub-themes identified and accounted for 8.87% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$). This sub-theme comprised responses such as “*She plays with me*” (Part. 59, G, PGR) and “*We play together*” (Part. 34, G, PGR). *General play* highlighted the general importance of play in preschoolers’ best friend nominations.

Dedicated play.

Dedicated play was ranked fifth out of the total 14 sub-themes identified and accounted for 5.42% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$). This sub-theme focused on three areas concerning how the nominated best friend appeared to be dedicated to the preschooler in play. These are discussed below.

Firstly, three preschoolers appeared to favour as best friends those peers who were understood to have chosen to play only with them, for example, “*he plays only with me*” (Part. 61, B, PGR) and “*X wants to play with me more*” (Part. 6, B, GR). The nominated peer was understood to have selected the preschooler as a playmate as opposed to alternative peers, thus revealing a sense of commitment to the preschooler. The preschooler’s appreciation of the peer’s selection of him or her as a playmate, and potential feelings of privilege or entitlement experienced in response to the selection, may have encouraged the preschooler to nominate the peer as a best friend.

Secondly, five preschoolers were found to focus on how frequently peers played with them. Those peers who played with the nominating preschooler often tended to be selected as

best friends. For example “*playing with me every day*” (Part. 38, B, PGR), “*because she plays with me every day*” (Part. 50, G, PGR) and “*Sy speel elke dag met my as ek skool toe kom*” [*She plays with me every day when I come to school*] (Part. 30, G, GR). Frequent play was thought to highlight the best friend’s dedication to playing with the preschooler. This continual and reliable type of interaction appeared to be attractive to preschoolers. It may have encouraged feelings of security within the preschooler as he or she became aware of the stable and predictable relationship. Responses such as these may reflect the importance of commitment and loyalty amongst peers. The acknowledgement of these qualities in peers may promote their selection as best friends.

Thirdly, three preschoolers emphasised the duration of play with peers. Preschoolers tended to select those as best friends who they interacted with for long periods of time, for example, “*she plays with me the whole day*” (Part. 35, G, PGR) and “*we play the whole day*” (Part. 39, B, PGR). The best friend appeared to be dedicated to playing with the preschooler by playing with her/him for a lengthy period. This may have fostered feelings of security within the nominating preschooler, possibly allowing her/him to feel confident in the relationship and trusting of the peer. Furthermore, the preschooler may have been made to feel important. A feeling of significance may have enhanced the preschooler’s fondness for the peer.

Imitation and skills development.

Imitation and skills development was ranked ninth out of the total 14 sub-themes identified and accounted for 4.43% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$). Preschoolers were found to nominate peers who imitated them during activities as best friends. They were also found to nominate peers who they imitated during activities as best friends. In both scenarios, imitation was found to be related to the development of skills.

Preschoolers were found to nominate as best friends those peers who were inclined to copy them while performing an activity. For example “*X copies me when I colour in my picture*” (Part. 6, B, GR) and “*He copies me when we draw*” (Part. 18, B, GR). The nominated peer appeared to develop his or her skills through imitating the preschooler. This finding suggested that a peer who may be less advanced in some aspect and who may attempt to develop a skill through the imitation of a peer is likely to be nominated as a best friend. Being imitated may promote feelings of pride, appreciation, superiority and accomplishment. The preschooler may have felt respected by the imitating peer, which may have elevated his or her level of fondness for that peer and encouraged the nomination of the peer as a best friend. One preschooler gave the response “*I jungle and she can’t so I help her to learn. I can teach her to go upside down*” (Part. 54, G, PGR) as a reason for nominating a peer as a best friend. Being able to teach a less competent peer a particular skill may encourage the nomination of the less competent peer as a best friend. The preschooler may have appreciated the sense of authority instilled upon her by being able to teach the peer skills which she believed herself to be good at. In addition, this finding may suggest that preschoolers who are eager to learn skills from their peers and who copy peers may be nominated as best friends.

Preschoolers also seemed to nominate as best friends those who were thought to add to and advance their own skills. For example “*She teachers me to go faster*” (Part. 1, G, GR), “*X taught me how to do a flip jump. She taught me to also go left*” (Part. 36, G, PGR) and “*My friends taught me to be brave and hang upside down on the jungle*” (Part. 45, B, PGR). Emphasis was placed on the word “*taught*”, which indicated that the preschooler had observed, copied and learnt from the nominated peer. They had acquired skills through their interaction with and imitation of the nominated best friend.

5.3.3.3. Theme Three: Geographical associations.

Geographical associations, together with the theme *Similarity amongst preschoolers*, was the third most commonly reported theme in the study and accounted for 11.33% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$). The sub-themes comprising this theme included *Out-of-school interaction* (4.93%), *Propinquity* (3.94%), and *Familial Influence* (2.46%).

Out-of-school interaction.

Out-of-school interaction was ranked seventh out of the total 14 sub-themes identified and accounted for 4.93% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$). Ten preschoolers nominated as best friends those peers who they interacted with outside of the preprimary, preschool and daycare facility, for example, at each other's private homes. This arrangement allowed for their extended interaction. Examples of this sub-theme were "We can play with each other also after school for longer" (Part. 61, B, PGR), "slept at her house" (Part. 44, G, PGR), "play at his house" (Part. 38, B, PGR), and "she comes to my house to eat popcorn and watch movies and I also go to her house" (Part. 45, B, PGR). It was thought that the extended interaction between the preschoolers may have allowed them to develop a deeper relationship. They were able to engage in activities that could not be performed at the preprimary, preschool and daycare facility. This may have contributed to their friendship, adding a new dimension.

Propinquity.

Propinquity was ranked tenth out of the total 14 sub-themes identified and accounted for 3.94% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$). Three preschoolers were found to select a peer as a best friend because they were in the same class group as him or her. These responses included "He is in my class" (Part. 11, B, GR; Part.

23, B, GR) and “*We in the same class*” (Part. 45, B, PGR). These preschoolers appeared to base their best friend nominations on the proximity of a peer while situated within the preprimary, preschool and daycare facility. An additional reason given by three preschoolers for nominating a peer as a best friend was “*We sit together*” (Part. 11, B, GR; Part. 45, B, PGR; Part. 62, B, PGR). This response reinforced the importance of peer proximity in the classroom to preschoolers’ best friend nominations.

Two preschoolers gave the reason “*because we live by each other*” (Part. 24, B, GR; Part. 61, B, PGR). This further augmented the importance of peer proximity. However, these responses highlighted the significance of proximity to peers outside of the preprimary, preschool and daycare facility. It was apparent that those peers who lived in close proximity, possibly within the same neighbourhood, were likely to be nominated as best friends.

Familial influence.

Familial influence was ranked eleventh out of the total 14 sub-themes identified and accounted for 2.46% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$). Four preschoolers brought attention to the role that family may play in shaping preschoolers’ best friend nominations.

One preschooler gave the response “*because she is so special, just like my brother*” (Part. 36, G, PGR). On some level, the preschooler seemed to have equated the nominated peer with her brother. Employing the term “*special*” it was evident that the preschooler was fond of her brother, and that once she had identified a similarity between the peer and her brother, it was most likely that she would be fond of the peer too. This finding suggested that a preschooler’s identification of similarities between a family member and a peer may lend to that peer being sufficiently liked and nominated as a best friend. This also illustrated that

preschoolers' experience of their family members may indirectly influence their best friend nominations.

One preschooler gave the response “*My mommy said I need to play with her because X is being rude to me*” (Part. 58, G, PGR). It became evident that parents may intervene and instigate the development of certain friendships as opposed to others. Parents may influence preschoolers' orientations towards peers as well as the amount of time spent with peers, which may impact who they form friendships with. One preschooler gave the response “*My ma se ek moet na X se huis toe gaan*” [*My mom said I must go to X's house*] (Part. 67, B, PGR). This response justified the impact that parents may have on preschoolers' best friend nominations and the development of their friendships. As an authoritative figure, the mother had voiced that the preschooler should interact with the peer. This may have suggested to him that his mother approved of the peer and may have encouraged him to be fond of the peer. Moreover, respecting his mother's instruction, he may have interacted with the peer and gradually developed a relationship.

Lastly, one preschooler stated, “*Sy kom kuier altyd vir my oupa*” [*She always comes to visit my grandad*] (Part. 71, G, PGR). The peer's relationship with the preschooler's grandad and the peer's frequent visiting may have encouraged the preschooler to interact with the peer more often. This may have allowed for familiarity and a deeper relationship to be developed amongst the preschoolers leading to the best friend nomination. In addition, it was assumed that the preschooler may have felt closer to and fonder of the peer because of the peer's involvement with her grandad whom she was most likely fond of.

5.3.3.4. Theme Four: Similarity amongst preschoolers.

The third most common theme referred to by the preschoolers when nominating a peer as a best friend was *Similarity amongst preschoolers*. This theme accounted for 11.33% of the

total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$) alongside the theme *Geographical associations. Similarity amongst preschoolers* comprised four sub-themes. Arranged in rank order these were *Similarity in tastes and interests* (8.87%), *Similarity in skills* (0.99%), *Similarity in possessions* (0.99%), and *Similarity in physical appearance* (0.49%).

Similarity in tastes and interests.

This sub-theme was ranked third out of the total 14 sub-themes identified and accounted for 8.87% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$). Preschoolers highlighted a preference for those peers who liked the same colour as them, who had the same hobbies and learning interests as them, and who favoured the same television characters.

Preschoolers were found to nominate a peer as a best friend because he or she liked the same colour as him or her, for example, “*also likes purple*” (Part. 2, G, GR). Furthermore, having the same hobbies was emphasised by preschoolers, for example, “*we like to draw together*” (Part. 35, G, PGR), “*she likes to draw and paint and I also like to draw and paint*” (Part. 43, G, PGR), “*we enjoy rolling tyres together*” (Part. 25, B, GR), and “*we both like singing*” (Part. 50, G, PGR). The sharing of hobbies was thought to encourage preschoolers’ engagement with one another. This engagement was believed to offer unique opportunities for the development of friendship. Moreover, preschoolers referred to having the same learning interests when choosing a peer as a best friend. For example “*we all like to learn about animals*” (Part. 8, G, GR). A similarity in learning interests was thought to have instigated rapport amongst preschoolers and promoted the establishment of friendships.

Girls were found to nominate another girl as a best friend because she too liked princesses. Examples of this included “*We all like princesses*” (Part. 35, G, PGR) and “*I like to watch Cinderella and she also likes to watch Cinderella*” (Part. 51, G, PGR). The topic of

princesses, and in particular Cinderella, appeared to be popular. The preschoolers had recently watched a movie about princesses, which had sparked this interest. This illustrated the impact that television may have on preschoolers' best friend nominations. Those preschoolers who had not watched the princess movie may not have shared the same interest in princesses. Therefore, they may not have been nominated as a best friend according to this shared interest. A response which effectively summarised this sub-theme was "*We like the same things*" (Part. 48, G, PGR). Preschoolers were found to be attracted to those peers who enjoyed the same things as them.

Similarity in skills.

Similarity in skills was ranked twelfth out of the total 14 sub-themes identified and was referred to by 0.99% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$). Two preschoolers were found to nominate as best friends those peers who possessed similar skills to them. Responses included "*X kan ook baie mooi inkleur, soos ek*" [*X can also colour in very nicely, like me*] (Part. 31, G, GR) and "*Both of us jungle*" (Part. 56, G, PGR). "*Jungle*" was a term used to refer to swinging on the bars of the jungle gym apparatus at the preprimary, preschool and daycare facility. The sharing of skills may have allowed preschoolers to perform activities together. The enjoyment of being able to perform these in conjunction with one another, and the interaction that may have been encountered as a result of this, may have promoted the development of friendship. The nominated peer may be understood to have something in common with the preschooler thus uniting them in this regard, and may be perceived to be equally competent.

Similarity in possessions.

Similarity in possessions was ranked twelfth alongside *Similarity in skills* and accounted for 0.99% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question

($n = 203$). Preschoolers seemed to be attracted to those peers who had identical possessions to them. For example, two preschoolers chose peers as best friends giving the reasons “*she also gets a sticker*” (Part. 39, B, PGR) and “*also because she has the same boots like me*” (Part. 47, G, PGR). The nominating preschooler may have been attracted to the commonality between him- or herself and the peer. This commonality may have promoted feelings of identification and familiarity.

Similarity in physical appearance.

Similarity in physical appearance was ranked fourteenth out of the 14 sub-themes identified and accounted for 0.49% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$). One preschooler nominated another as a best friend because the peer had the same skin colour as him. The preschooler stated, “*Want hy is bruin net soos ek*” [*Because he is brown like me*] (Part. 25, B, GR). This was an interesting finding and illustrated the preschooler’s awareness of race.

5.3.3.5. Theme Five: General fondness.

General fondness was the fifth most common theme and accounted for 7.39% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$). Firstly, *General fondness* included preschoolers’ statements of how they in general liked a particular peer and therefore nominated that peer as a best friend. For example “*I like him*” (Part. 18, B, GR), “*Because I love her*” (Part. 51, G, PGR) and “*I just like him*” (Part. 57, B, PGR). No specific reason for liking the nominated peer was given.

Secondly, this theme included preschoolers’ nominations of peers that were perceived to be fond of them. For example “*Because she likes me*” (Part. 10, G, GR) and “*She loves me*” (Part. 12, B, GR). The nominated peer may have at some point or on repeated occasions shown affection towards the preschooler. The preschooler may have acknowledged the peer’s liking

and may have felt appreciated by him or her. These feelings may have elevated the preschooler's fondness for the peer. This finding suggests that those preschoolers who may display fondness towards peers may be nominated as best friends.

Lastly, preschoolers' descriptions of how a peer had wanted to be their best friend or friend, and for this reason was nominated as a best friend, comprised this theme. Examples included "*She wants to be my best friend*" (Part. 12, B, GR) and "*She always wants to be my friend*" (Part. 45, B, PGR). The nominated peer's recognised desire to be the preschooler's friend highlighted the peer's fondness for the preschooler. The preschooler's recognition of this fondness may have allowed him or her to feel loved by that peer, perhaps enjoying feelings of worthiness and importance. These feelings may have encouraged the preschooler to nominate the peer as a best friend. It was understood that peers who displayed a patent attempt to be friends with others tended to be nominated as best friends.

5.3.4. Differences in the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes according to gender.

In this section, the frequency of responses for the five best friend nomination themes and 14 best friend nomination sub-themes are analysed according to gender differences (see Tables 4 and 5). There were a total of 24 boys and 34 girls in the present study. A two-tailed t-test performed via Statistica was used as the statistical technique to undertake the group comparisons. The alpha level was set at .05.

5.3.4.1. Differences in the best friend nomination themes according to gender.

The frequency of responses for the five best friend nomination themes and theme rank orders are analysed according to gender differences in Table 4 below. T-tests performed via Statistica revealed significant gender differences in the frequency of responses for one theme, namely *Geographical associations*, $t(201) = 3.03, p < .05$. The alpha level was set at .05.

Table 4

Comparison of the Frequency of Responses (f) for Best Friend Nomination Themes and Theme Rank Orders According to Gender

Theme	Total Responses for Boys (n = 90)			Total Responses for Girls (n = 113)			<i>p-value</i>
	<i>f</i>	%	Rank Order	<i>f</i>	%	Rank Order	
Personal characteristics and psychological attributes	28	30.11	2	48	42.48	1	.071
Play and shared activities	32	35.56	1	34	30.09	2	.410
Geographical associations	17	18.89	3	6	5.31	5	.003*
Similarity amongst preschoolers	7	7.78	4	16	14.16	3	.156
General fondness	6	6.67	5	9	7.96	4	.727

*Note: * $p < .05$*

Geographical associations.

As can be seen above in Table 4, a significant gender difference was calculated for the theme *Geographical associations*, $t(201) = 3.03$, $p < .05$, with boys referring to this theme significantly more than girls when providing a reason for nominating a peer as a best friend. *Geographical associations* was referred to in 18.89% of the total number of responses given for nominating a peer as a best friend by the boys ($n = 90$). This sub-theme was only referred to in 5.31% of the total number of responses given for nominating a peer as a best friend by the girls ($n = 113$). This suggested that the boys may have regarded geographical associations as more important when nominating a peer as a best friend as opposed to the girls in the present study.

5.3.4.2. Differences in the best friend nomination sub-themes according to gender.

The frequency of responses for the 14 best friend nomination sub-themes and sub-theme rank orders are analysed according to gender differences in Table 5 below. T-tests performed via Statistica revealed significant gender differences in the frequency of responses for two sub-themes, namely *Socially positive traits and behaviour*, $t(201) = 2.98, p < .05$, and *Propinquity*, $t(201) = 3.23, p < .05$. The alpha level was set at .05.

Socially positive traits and behaviour.

As can be seen in Table 5 below, a significant gender difference was calculated for the sub-theme *Socially positive traits and behaviour*, $t(201) = 2.98, p < .05$, with girls referring to this sub-theme significantly more than boys when providing a reason for nominating a peer as a best friend. *Socially positive traits and behaviour* was referred to in 35.40% of the total number of responses given for nominating a peer as a best friend by the girls ($n = 113$). This sub-theme was only referred to in 16.67% of the total number of responses given for nominating a peer as a best friend by the boys ($n = 90$). This suggested that the girls may have found peers' socially positive traits and behaviour to be more important when nominating a peer as a best friend as opposed to the boys.

Propinquity.

As can be seen in Table 5 below, the boys made reference to the sub-theme *Propinquity*, $t(201) = 3.23, p < .05$, significantly more than the girls when providing a reason for nominating a peer as a best friend. 8.89% of the total number of responses given by the boys for nominating a peer as a best friend referred to the propinquity of the nominated best friend ($n = 90$). 0% of the total number of responses given by the girls for nominating a peer as a best friend referred to this sub-theme ($n = 113$). This suggested that the boys regarded the propinquity of peers as significantly more important when nominating a peer as a best friend as opposed to the girls.

Table 5

Comparison of the Frequency of Responses (f) for Best Friend Nomination Sub-themes and Sub-theme Rank Orders According to Gender

Theme	Sub-theme	Total Responses for Boys (n = 90)			Total Responses for Girls (n = 113)			p-value
		f	%	Rank Order	f	%	Rank Order	
Personal characteristics and psychological attributes	Socially positive traits and behaviour	15	16.67	1	40	35.40	1	.003*
	Gender attributes	8	8.89	4	3	2.65	8	.052
	Physical attractiveness	5	5.56	9	5	4.42	5	.710
Play and shared activities	Shared specific play	13	14.44	2	15	13.27	2	.810
	General play	9	10.00	3	9	7.96	4	.612
	Dedicated play	6	6.67	7	5	4.42	5	.482
	Imitation and skills development	4	4.44	10	5	4.42	5	.995
Geographical associations	Out-of-school interaction	7	7.78	6	3	2.65	8	.095
	Proximity	8	8.89	4	0	0.00	13	.001*
	Familial influence	2	2.22	11	3	2.65	8	.844
Similarity amongst preschoolers	Similarity in tastes and interests	6	6.67	7	12	10.62	3	.327
	Similarity in skills	0	0.00	13	2	1.77	11	.206
	Similarity in possessions	0	0.00	13	2	1.77	11	.206

Table 5 continued

Comparison of the Frequency of Responses (f) for Best Friend Nomination Sub-themes and Sub-theme Rank Orders According to Gender

Theme	Sub-theme	Total Responses for Boys (n = 90)			Total Responses for Girls (n = 113)			<i>p-value</i>
		<i>f</i>	%	Rank Order	<i>f</i>	%	Rank Order	
Similarity amongst preschoolers	Similarity in physical appearance	1	1.11	12	0	0.00	13	.288
General fondness		6	6.67	--	9	7.96	--	.727

*Note: * $p < .05$*

5.3.5. Differences in the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes between class groups.

In this section, the frequency of responses for the five best friend nomination themes and 14 best friend nomination sub-themes are analysed according to class group differences (see Tables 6 and 7). A two-tailed t-test performed via Statistica was used as the statistical technique to undertake the group comparisons. The alpha level was set at .05.

5.3.5.1. Differences in the best friend nomination themes between class groups.

The frequency of responses for the five best friend nomination themes and theme rank orders are analysed according to class group differences in Table 6 below. The two classes referred to in the present study included Pre-Grade R (4 years to 4 years and 11 months) and Grade R (5 years to 5 years and 11 months). Thirty-two preschoolers comprised the Pre-Grade R class group and 26 preschoolers comprised the Grade R class group. T-tests performed via Statistica revealed no significant differences in the frequency of responses for the five themes between the class groups (see Table 6). The alpha level was set at .05.

Table 6

Comparison of the Frequency of Responses (f) for Best Friend Nomination Themes and Theme Rank Orders According to Class Group

Theme	Total Responses for Grade R (n = 69)			Total Responses for Pre-Grade R (n = 134)			<i>p-value</i>
	<i>f</i>	%	Rank Order	<i>f</i>	%	Rank Order	
Personal characteristics and psychological attributes	26	37.68	1	50	37.31	1	.959
Play and shared activities	26	37.68	1	40	29.85	2	.261
Geographical associations	4	5.80	5	19	14.18	3	.076
Similarity amongst preschoolers	5	7.25	4	18	13.43	4	.190
General fondness	8	11.59	3	7	5.22	5	.102

5.3.5.2. Differences in the best friend nomination sub-themes between class groups.

The frequency of responses for the 14 best friend nomination sub-themes and sub-theme rank orders are analysed according to class group differences in Table 7 below. T-tests performed via Statistica revealed no significant differences in the frequency of responses for the best friend nomination sub-themes between the class groups (see Table 7). The alpha level was set at .05.

Table 7

Comparison of the Frequency of Responses (f) for Best Friend Nomination Sub-themes and Sub-theme Rank Orders According to Class Group

Theme	Sub-theme	Total Responses for Grade R (n = 69)			Total Responses for Pre-Grade R (n = 134)			<i>p-value</i>
		<i>f</i>	%	Rank Order	<i>f</i>	%	Rank Order	
Personal characteristics and psychological attributes	Socially positive traits and behaviour	20	28.99	1	35	26.12	1	.664
	Gender attributes	3	4.35	5	8	5.97	6	.630
	Physical attractiveness	3	4.35	5	7	5.22	7	.786
Play and shared activities	Shared specific play	9	13.04	2	19	14.18	2	.824
	General play	9	13.04	2	9	6.72	4	.135
	Dedicated play	5	7.25	4	6	4.48	8	.410
	Imitation and skills development	3	4.35	5	6	4.48	8	.966
Geographical associations	Out-of-school interaction	1	1.45	10	9	6.72	4	.102
	Proximity	3	4.35	5	5	3.73	10	.830
	Familial influence	0	0.00	13	5	3.73	10	.106
Similarity amongst preschoolers	Similarity in tastes and interests	3	4.35	5	15	11.19	3	.106
	Similarity in skills	1	1.45	10	1	0.75	13	.633
	Similarity in possessions	0	0.0	13	2	1.49	12	.309

Table 7 continued

Comparison of the Frequency of Responses (f) for Best Friend Nomination Sub-themes and Sub-theme Rank Orders According to Class Group

Theme	Sub-theme	Total responses for Grade R (n = 69)			Total responses for Pre-Grade R (n = 134)			<i>p-value</i>
		<i>f</i>	%	Rank Order	<i>f</i>	%	Rank Order	
Similarity amongst preschoolers	Similarity in physical appearance	1	1.45	10	0	0.00	14	.164
		8	11.59	--	7	5.22	--	.571
General fondness								

5.4. Peer status amongst preschoolers

In this section, the second research question is addressed. This question asked whether there were any distinguishing characteristics amongst preschoolers who received more peer nominations (high peer status preschoolers) compared to those who received fewer peer nominations (low peer status preschoolers). There were a total of 42 high peer status preschoolers and 30 low peer status preschoolers in the present study.

The frequency of responses for the five best friend nomination themes and theme rank orders are displayed and analysed according to peer status differences in Table 8 below. Thereafter, the frequency of responses for the 14 best friend nomination sub-themes and sub-theme rank orders are displayed and analysed according to peer status differences in Table 9. A two-tailed t-test performed via Statistica was used as the statistical technique to undertake the group comparisons. The alpha level was set at .05. Lastly, differences in the content of the best friend nomination sub-themes between the high peer status and low peer status groups are explored.

5.4.1. Differences in the best friend nomination themes between peer status groups.

The frequency of responses for the five best friend nomination themes and theme rank orders are displayed and analysed according to peer status differences in Table 8 below. T-tests performed via Statistica revealed no significant differences in the frequency of responses for the best friend nomination themes between the high peer status and low peer status groups. The alpha level was set at .05.

Table 8

Comparison of the Frequency of Responses (f) for Best Friend Nomination Themes and Theme Rank Orders According to Peer Status

Theme	Total Responses for High Peer Status (n = 173)			Total Responses for Low Peer Status (n = 56)			p-value
	f	%	Rank Order	f	%	Rank Order	
Personal characteristics and psychological attributes	65	37.57	1	19	33.93	2	.624
Play and shared activities	55	31.79	2	22	39.29	1	.303
Geographical associations	19	10.98	4	4	7.14	5	.407
Similarity amongst preschoolers	22	12.72	3	6	10.71	3	.690
General fondness	12	6.94	5	5	8.93	4	.622

5.4.2. Differences in the best friend nomination sub-themes between peer status groups.

The frequency of responses for the 14 best friend nomination sub-themes and sub-theme rank orders are displayed and analysed according to peer status differences in Table 9 below. T-tests performed via Statistica revealed a significant difference in the frequency of responses for the sub-theme *General Play*, $t(227) = 2.06$, $p < .05$, between the peer status groups. The alpha level was set at .05. No other significant differences in the frequency of responses for the best friend nomination sub-themes were found between the peer status groups.

General play.

As can be seen in Table 9 below, a significant difference in the frequency of responses for the best friend nomination sub-theme *General play*, $t(227) = 2.06$, $p < .05$, was found between the peer status groups. *General play* was found to be significantly more common amongst the low peer status group than amongst the high peer status group. 5.78% of the total number of responses obtained for nominating a high peer status preschooler as a best friend ($n = 173$) were attributed to *General play*. A significantly greater percentage of 14.29% of the total number of responses obtained for nominating a low peer status preschooler as a best friend ($n = 56$) were attributed to *General play*.

Table 9

Comparison of the Frequency of Responses (f) for Best Friend Nomination Sub-themes and Sub-theme Rank Orders According to Peer Status

Theme	Sub-theme	Total Responses for High Peer Status (n = 173)			Total Responses for Low Peer Status (n = 56)			p-value
		f	%	Rank Order	f	%	Rank Order	
Personal characteristics and psychological attributes	Socially positive traits and behaviour	46	26.59	1	10	17.86	1	.188
	Gender attributes	6	3.47	8	5	8.93	5	.098
	Physical attractiveness	13	7.51	4	4	7.14	6	.927
Play and shared activities	Shared specific play	30	17.34	2	9	16.07	2	.826
	General play	10	5.78	5	8	14.29	3	.041*
	Dedicated play	9	5.20	6	2	3.57	8	.620
	Imitation and skills development	6	3.47	8	3	5.36	7	.528
Geographical associations	Out-of-school interaction	9	5.20	6	1	1.79	10	.279
	Proximity	6	3.47	8	2	3.57	8	.972
	Familial influence	4	2.31	11	1	1.79	10	.817
Similarity amongst preschoolers	Similarity in tastes and interests	17	9.83	3	6	10.71	4	.849
	Similarity in skills	2	1.16	12	0	0.00	12	.419
	Similarity in possessions	2	1.16	12	0	0.00	12	.419

Table 9 continued

Comparison of the Frequency of Responses (f) for Best Friend Nomination Sub-themes and Sub-theme Rank Orders According to Peer Status

Theme	Sub-theme	Total Responses for High Peer Status (n = 173)			Total Responses for Low Peer Status (n = 56)			p-value
		f	%	Rank Order	f	%	Rank Order	
Similarity amongst preschoolers	Similarity in physical appearance	1	0.58	14	0	0.00	12	.569
General fondness		12	6.94	--	5	8.93	--	.622

Note: * $p < .05$

5.4.3. Differences in the best friend nomination sub-theme content between peer status groups.

Notable differences in the content of the sub-theme *Socially positive traits and behaviour* were found between the high peer status and low peer status groups.

Socially positive traits and behaviour.

In this sub-theme, preschoolers' reasons for nominating high peer status preschoolers as best friends appeared to be more descriptive and lengthy as opposed to those reasons for nominating low peer status preschoolers as best friends. High peer status preschoolers appeared to represent a wider range of prosocial traits and behaviours as opposed to low peer status preschoolers. While the latter were mentioned to share their food and play equipment, and were described as kind, the former, in addition to the above, were described to be effective turn-takers, assist when a peer had hurt him- or herself, and were often perceived to be loving. Some high peer status preschoolers were nominated as best friends due to their inclination to be humorous through their actions. Examples included "*she always pulls my finger, pulls my legs and plays jokes*" (Part. 41, G, PGR) and "*he tickles me*" (Part. 6, B, GR). This was not found

amongst low peer status preschoolers. Moreover, verbal humour was found to be particular to high peer status preschoolers, for example, “*says funny words*” (Part. 35, G, PGR).

5.5. Chapter summary

This chapter presented the results of the study. Firstly the demographic characteristics of the participant sample was given. The five best friend nomination themes and 14 best friend nomination sub-themes according to which preschoolers were nominated as best friends were displayed in a quantitative manner. Thereafter the content of the best friend nomination sub-themes were explored. Following this, differences in the frequency of responses for the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes according to gender and class group were addressed. Differences in the frequency of responses for the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes between the peer status groups were presented next. The chapter concluded with the notable differences in the best friend nomination sub-theme content found between high peer status and low peer status groups.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

6.1. Introduction to discussion of results

In this chapter the results of the present study's two research questions, namely what factors influenced preschoolers' nominations as a best friend, and whether there were any distinguishing characteristics amongst preschoolers receiving more peer nominations (high peer status preschoolers) compared to those receiving fewer peer nominations (low peer status preschoolers), are discussed in relation to previous literature. This chapter begins by discussing the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes according to which the preschoolers were nominated as best friends. Thereafter, significant differences in the frequency of responses for the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes are discussed according to gender and class group. This is followed by a discussion of the significant differences in the frequency of responses for the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes between the peer status groups. Finally, notable differences in the best friend nomination sub-theme content between high peer status and low peer status groups are discussed.

6.2. Best friend nomination themes and sub-themes

The five best friend nomination themes (see Table 2) determined for the total sample (N = 58), presented in rank order, were *Personal characteristics and psychological attributes* (37.44%); *Play and shared activities* (32.51%); *Geographical associations* (11.33%); *Similarity amongst preschoolers* (11.33%), and *General Fondness* (7.39%). Although the themes were supported by existing literature, some of the sub-themes (seen in Table 3) were novel. These included *Shared specific play* (13.79%); *General play* (8.87%); *Dedicated play* (5.42%), and *Imitation and skills development* (4.43%), which comprised the *Play and shared activities* theme; *Out-of-school interaction* (4.93%) and *Familial influence* (2.46%), which

formed part of the *Geographical associations* theme, and *Similarity in skills* (0.99%), which fell under the *Similarity amongst preschoolers* theme. Each theme identified in this study is discussed below by addressing the relevant sub-themes in relation to previous literature and theory.

6.2.1. Theme One: Personal characteristics and psychological attributes.

In this study, the preschoolers most frequently referred to the theme *Personal characteristics and psychological attributes* (see Table 2) when nominating peers as best friends. This theme accounted for 37.44% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$), and consisted of three sub-themes, namely *Socially positive traits and behaviour* (27.09%), *Gender attributes* (5.42%), and *Physical attractiveness* (4.93%) (see Table 3).

Socially positive traits and behaviour.

As seen in Table 3, *Socially positive traits and behaviour* was the most frequently referred to sub-theme of the 14 sub-themes identified and accounted for 27.09% of the total number of responses obtained for the first research question ($n = 203$). *Socially positive traits and behaviour* included preschoolers' nominations of peers as best friends who were perceived to share objects, who took turns during activities, who had a good sense of humour and who were considered to be altruistic, kind, helpful and caring. The contents of this sub-theme appeared to contradict early assumptions regarding preschoolers' friendships. For example, Bigelow and La Gaipa (1980) hypothesised that prosocial sharing may be recognised as a feature of friendship by children aged 9 to 10 and no younger. However, more recent studies such as Ogelman and Secer (2012) have found prosocial behaviour to be a principle predictor of preschoolers' friend nominations. These more recent studies therefore support the findings of the present study.

Piaget's (1971, 1972) cognitive developmental theory has suggested that preschoolers occupy the preoperational period of development, which is characterised by the notion of perceptual centration, that is, the tendency to focus on the most noticeable factors and ignore additional characteristics. Early postulations regarding preschoolers' friendships appear to be grounded in this understanding. These generally posit that the less apparent features of friendship such as affective, motivational and prosocial intentions cannot be recognised by preschoolers (Bigelow & La Gaipa, 1980; Selman, 1980). Rather, preschoolers are suggested to focus on the most salient features of friendship such as physical attractiveness, propinquity and shared play (Bigelow & La Gaipa, 1980; Furman & Bierman, 1983; Selman, 1980). Conversely, according to recent developmental literature cited in Louw and Louw (2014) and Walker et al. (2016), prosocial behaviour may be recognised by children at 2 to 4 years of age, and they may nominate peers as friends according to these by the age of 4. This supports the present study's finding that preschoolers (aged 4 to 6 years) may identify peers' prosocial traits and behaviour as a feature of friendship and may nominate peers as best friends accordingly.

Recent studies such as Sebanc et al. (2007) and Shin et al. (2014) highlight the importance of positive individual traits to preschoolers' friend choices. For example, Sebanc et al. (2007) found that being selected as a best friend was predicted by positive individual traits amongst children aged 3 to 7 years. Shin et al. (2014) found that children aged 3 to 5 may commonly define best friendship in terms of the assistance of one another in activity. Not only did the present study confirm the importance of prosocial traits and behaviour in accordance with the above mentioned studies, it also found that *Socially positive traits and behaviour* was the most frequently referred to sub-theme.

Preschoolers who showed care and concern, who were responsive and who assisted peers tended to be nominated as best friends. For example, one preschooler nominated a peer as a best friend stating "*We put each other's jackets on each other when we get cold*" (Part. 43,

G, PGR). Findings such as these are supported by Schaefer et al. (2010), who found that children (aged 3 to 5) who were responsive to peers were most successful at initiating friendships and were better liked. Turn-taking and mindful collaboration with peers were also found to support preschoolers' best friend nominations in the present study. This may be illustrated by the response "*Take turns when we play*" (Part. 38, B, PGR). This finding is supported by Goldstein et al. (1989) who suggested that children who engage in turn-taking were more likely to be considered friends.

Lastly, preschoolers who displayed a good sense of humour by means of joking, pulling humorous faces, laughing and tickling their peers were nominated as best friends. For example, some of the reasons for best friend nominations included "*Because he tickles me and makes jokes and laughs with me*" (Part. 4, G, GR) and "*She always pulls my finger, pulls my leg and plays jokes*" (Part. 41, G, PGR). Humour has been considered a crucial component of preschoolers' social interactions and produces positive emotions important to mental well-being (Semrud-Clikeman & Glass, 2010). Semrud-Clikeman and Glass (2010) suggest that a sense of humour may be related to peer likeability and that children who are humorous are often chosen as friends. A preschooler in the present study was considered humorous because of her manipulation of word sounds ("*She says funny words*") (Part. 35, G, PGR). This may be explained by McGhee's (1979) stages of humour development, which posits that children aged 3 to 5 years produce humour by distorting language features. At these ages, humour is thought to be tied to the development of language and creativity (Guo et al., 2011). This suggests that preschoolers who are humorous may be creative.

The present study's finding that socially positive traits and behaviour are important to preschoolers' best friend nominations is supported by more recent literature (Schaefer et al., 2010; Sebanc et al., 2007; Shin et al., 2014; Walker et al., 2016). It suggests that preschoolers

are capable of recognising prosocial traits and behaviour in their peers and that these may predict their nominations as best friends.

Gender attributes.

Gender attributes was ranked fifth out of the total 14 sub-themes identified and accounted for 5.42% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$) (see Table 3). Studies have found that preschoolers tend to select same-gender peers as friends (Belle, 1989; Graham et al., 1998). This tendency has been recorded as one of the most prominent patterns in preschoolers' friendships (Belle, 1989), and may be explained by Piaget's (1971, 1972) notion of perceptual centration. As stated earlier, this is the tendency for children to focus on the most salient features and to ignore additional characteristics (Piaget, 1972). Furthermore, Piaget (1972) suggests that children between the ages of 2 and 7 years are egocentric, meaning that they may struggle to understand the viewpoints of others and therefore tend to prefer peers who are similar to themselves. In light of this, it was expected that all preschoolers who nominated a peer as a best friend according to gender in the present study would articulate a same-gender bias. However, this was not the case as only seven of the 11 responses revealed a same-gender bias. These responses included for example "*also a girl*" (Part. 51, G, PGR), "*also a boy*" (Part. 18, B, GR), "*only friends with boys*" (Part. 63, B, PGR) and "*I only like girls. Boys want to kiss girls. That's disgusting*" (Part. 36, G, PGR). The remaining responses that comprised the *Gender attributes* sub-theme showed a preference for both genders or for the opposite sex.

Two preschoolers articulated a preference for both genders stating "*I like girls and boys*" (Part. 26, B, GR) and "*I also like to play with boys*" (Part. 59, G, PGR). An additional two preschoolers emphasised a preference for peers of the opposite sex. One preschooler stated that he liked girls as friends more than boys because the boys in his peer group had been "*rude*" to him (Part. 21, B, GR). This suggests that he may have been bullied. Findings like this may

assist educational facilitators in identifying potentially at-risk preschoolers. Another preschooler outlined a barrier to being friends with the opposite sex. He expressed that although he wanted to be friends with girls, they did not want to be friends with him because they preferred “*big boy friends*” (Part. 39, B, PGR). He seemed to display an insecurity regarding his small stature, highlighting the masculine ideal commonly portrayed in the media and the stereotype that girls are attracted to muscular men (De Jesus et al., 2015).

According to Bandura’s (1977, 1986) social learning theory, children typically learn by observing and imitating the behaviour of others. In application, children may learn stereotypes by observing others’ reactions to the media and through the messages displayed by significant others. For example, in an international qualitative study involving 58 children aged approximately 3 to 4 years, McCabe et al. (2007) found that boys displayed concerns about their muscles following their mothers’ messages to them that they should be strong and gain muscles. This indicates that parents should be cautious of their influence. Moreover, insecurities in children should be addressed early to prevent possible internalising problems such as anxiety which may transpire from prolonged insecurity (De Jesus et al., 2015).

Physical attractiveness.

Physical attractiveness was ranked seventh out of the total 14 sub-themes identified and accounted for 4.93% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$) (see Table 3). Girls tended to nominate those who they perceived to be “*pretty*” as best friends for example “*X is a pretty girl too*” (Part. 56, G, PGR). Furthermore, during the nomination process, they mentioned both the genetic attractiveness of the peer as well as the appealing clothes that the peer wore, for example “*she wears a pretty t-shirt*” (Part. 51, G, PGR). Boys tended to focus more on the physical size and strength of peers. For example, one boy stated “*X rolls the tyres and he is strong. I want to be strong like him. He is big*” (Part. 39, B, PGR). This could be attributed to the previously discussed stereotype of the

masculine ideal, which children may learn through the media's representation of men and through the messages given by significant others (De Jesus et al., 2015).

International studies have found physical attractiveness to be a strong predictor of preschoolers' friend nominations (Brendgen & Boivin, 2011; Drewry & Clark, 1985; Edelman, 2009; Hawley et al., 2007). This tendency may be explained by Piaget's (1972) notion of perceptual centration, which posits that children aged 2 to 7 years tend to focus considerably on the most noticeable features of others. Although no South African studies on the association between physical attractiveness and preschoolers' friend nominations were found, a positive relationship between these components was identified in international studies such as Drewry and Clark (1985), Edelman (2009) and Hawley et al. (2007).

Drewry and Clark (1985) for example found that children aged 2 to 5 who were considered attractive were commonly selected as friends. Moreover, Edelman (2009) found that at the ages of 4 to 5 years, boys were more likely than girls to base their friendship choices on their peers' physical attractiveness. Girls on the other hand were more likely to favour peers' prosocial behaviour (Edelman, 2009). These gender differences will be discussed in more detail below. Hawley et al. (2007), who examined the relationship of 153 3- to 6-year-olds' physical attractiveness with power, status, aggression and social skills, found that popular children were rated as the most physically attractive in the peer group. Those who were most attractive were also identified to be the most popular (Hawley et al., 2007). In light of the prominence of physical attractiveness in international literature on this topic, the fact that it did not appear more commonly in the present study suggests that things may be different in a South African context. Other factors may be more important to South African preschoolers' best friend nominations.

6.2.2. Theme Two: Play and shared activities.

Play and shared activities was the second most frequently referred to theme in this study. As seen in Table 2, this theme accounted for 32.51% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$). Previous studies, for example Field et al. (1994), have regarded play and shared activity to be an important component of preschoolers' friend nominations. Ramazan et al. (2012), who investigated 40 preschoolers' views on play, found that play was frequently referred to by the preschoolers as what they do with their friends. Vygotsky (1976) postulated that play with peers is the principle activity of the preschool period. It is therefore not surprising that play was found to strongly impact the preschoolers' best friend nominations in the present study. As seen in Table 3, *Play and shared activities* included four sub-themes, namely *Shared specific play* (13.79%); *General play* (8.87%); *Dedicated play* (5.42%), and *Imitation and skills development* (4.43%). To date, no previous international or South African studies have identified or discussed these sub-themes as factors that may influence preschoolers' nominations as a best friend. These could therefore be considered novel.

Shared specific play.

Shared specific play was the second most prominent sub-theme out of the total 14 sub-themes identified (see Table 3). 13.79% of the total number of responses ($n = 203$) referred to play with peers that involved a specific type of play activity, for example, “*we play on the jungle gym together*” (Part. 1, G, GR) and “*we play dinosaurs together*” (Part. 57, B, PGR). *Shared specific play* highlighted that preschoolers were not only nominated as best friends because they played with the peer, but because they engaged in a particular play activity with that peer. The responses comprising *Shared specific play* were more detailed than those constituting *General play*, which included responses such as “*we play together*” (Part. 3, B, GR) and “*plays with me*” (Part. 52, B, PGR). This suggested a need for the more detailed

responses to be separate from those of a general nature, resulting in the creation of the sub-theme *Shared specific play*. This is therefore the first study to document a distinction between general and specific play.

Lindsey (2014) suggested that advancements in physical development may benefit preschoolers' abilities to engage in new activities with peers while simultaneously promoting friendship. By the age of 4, preschoolers are thought to have developed the appropriate motor skills necessary for forms of movement such as running and jumping (Lindsey, 2014). This may promote their engagement in exercise play, which involves complex activities that require twisting, throwing, running, falling to the ground and skipping (Lindsey, 2014). According to Lindsey (2014), those who participate in exercise play tend to be more adept playmates and may be perceived as entertaining play partners. This was illustrated when one of the preschoolers in the present study nominated a best friend because they enjoyed "*rolling tyres together*" (Part. 25, B, GR). Preschoolers' advanced physical skills may promote their participation in new or interesting activities, which may attract the attention of their peers (Eggum-Wilkens et al., 2014; Lindsey, 2014). The present study suggested that this increased the likelihood of the preschoolers being nominated as best friends with reference to the activity of interest. In addition, these activities may have acquired labels, for example, the term "*jungle*" (Part. 56, G, PGR) in the present study was used to refer to playing on the jungle gym. This study assumed that preschoolers who participated in labelled activities were nominated as best friends because of their participation in these as opposed to being identified as generally playing with peers.

Shared specific play also referred to play involving toys, for example, "*we play dolls together*" (Part. 58, G, PGR). According to Lindsey (2014), preschoolers who engage in toy-mediated play tend to be selected as friends and are perceived to be more attractive play partners. However, disputes over toys may lead to verbal and physical aggression, and it is

therefore important that parents and educational facilitators monitor peer play and that preschoolers develop self-regulation (Ramani et al., 2010).

General play.

As seen in Table 3, *General play* was ranked third out of the total 14 sub-themes identified. 8.87% of the total number of responses ($n = 203$) referred to general play with peers such as “*we play together*” (Part. 3, B, GR), “*plays with me*” (Part. 7, G, GR) and “*I play with him*” (Part. 15, B, GR). A number of studies have found play to be a predominant predictor of preschoolers’ friendships (Duncan & Tarulli, 2003; Eggum-Wilkens et al., 2014; Field et al., 1994; Furman & Bierman, 1983; Hayes et al., 1980; Lindsey, 2014; Ramazan et al., 2012). For example, Field et al. (1994) found play to be the most common reason for having a friend among 16 preschoolers alongside liking the peer. According to Vygotsky (1976), play is the central medium through which preschoolers interact. It is therefore not surprising that general play emerged as a dominant factor that influenced preschoolers’ best friend nominations in the present study.

Developmental literature has suggested that preschoolers’ physical, cognitive and language development may promote play and may benefit their potential to form friendships (Louw & Louw, 2014). Physically, preschoolers may develop motor skills allowing them to engage in play (Eggum-Wilkens et al., 2014; Lindsey, 2014). The principle cognitive development which occurs during the preoperational phase according to Piaget (1971, 1972) is symbolic or mental representation and may add to play. As mentioned in Louw and Louw (2014), there are three types of representation, namely, deferred imitation, symbolic play and spoken language. Deferred imitation, which refers to the ability to replicate the behaviour of a model that is not present, may support preschoolers’ creation of novel games (Louw & Louw, 2014). For example, preschoolers may roleplay the behaviour of a television character and

develop a game based on that character, such as boys improvising the behaviour of an action hero leading to an action-hero informed game as found in the present study.

Symbolic play, also known as pretend or fantasy play, involves substituting real situations with imaginary ones, and requires the use of children's imagination (Louw & Louw, 2014). This may promote the development of novel games and activities, as well as diversity and excitement in play (Hoyte et al., 2014). For example, Hoyte et al. (2014) found that preschool boys' imaginary play was associated with excitement amongst peers. Linguistically, advancements in spoken language such as the ability to use more complex sentences allows preschoolers to converse more fluently and comprehensively with one another, as well as clarify game rules and convey instructions more effectively (Louw & Louw, 2014).

With regard to spoken language, improvements in social speech, defined as "speech intended to be understood by the listener", may support preschoolers' positive social interactions (Louw & Louw, 2014, p. 175). Social speech is believed to develop in combination with the development of theory of mind, defined as "a set of opinions constructed by a child (and adult) to explain other people's ideas, beliefs, desires and behaviour" (Louw & Louw, 2014, p. 164). Preschoolers gradually develop an understanding of the emotions and thoughts of others, and, in combination with increased language proficiencies, they may be better able to adjust their conversations to fit the perspectives of their peers (Louw & Louw, 2014). This may assist them to respond in an appropriate manner during play and may reduce peer conflict. Due to the contributions these developments have on play, it is clear why Vygotsky (1976) declared play to be the principle means of interaction amongst preschoolers, as well as why researchers have stated that play largely defines preschoolers' friendships (e.g. Duncan & Tarulli, 2003; Lindsey, 2014). This supports the present study's finding that play was a predominant factor that influenced preschoolers' nominations as a best friend.

Dedicated play.

Dedicated play was ranked fifth out of the total 14 sub-themes identified and accounted for 5.42% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$) (see Table 3). Responses in *Dedicated play* go beyond those comprising *General play*, for example, “*plays with me*” (Part. 7, G, GR), to specify how often the nominated best friend played with the nominating preschooler and to emphasise the duration of play. This sub-theme included responses that highlighted the nominated best friend’s conscious decision to play with the preschooler as opposed to another peer. A general theme involving the dedication of a nominated best friend to play with the nominee emerged throughout. The sub-theme *Dedicated play* can be considered novel as it has not been identified in any previous international or South African studies as a factor that may influence preschoolers’ nominations as a best friend.

The tendency to nominate a peer who plays often or for a lengthy period as a best friend can, however, be explained by existing literature. Frequent or lengthy play tends to increase the level of familiarity between preschoolers (Doyle et al., 1980). Frequent contact is thought to reduce apprehension which may be associated with unfamiliarity (Kehily & Swann, 2003). The more familiar the peer, the less apprehension experienced, the greater the possibility of liking associated with friendship (Doyle et al., 1980; Kehily & Swann, 2003; Schneider, Atkinson, & Tardif, 2001), and the higher the probability that the peer will be nominated as a best friend.

The responses comprising *Dedicated play* may suggest that preschoolers are capable of recognising the qualities of loyalty and commitment in their peers. For example, a preschooler may have perceived the nominated peer as being dedicated to him or her because they chose to play with him or her as opposed to another peer. This possibility may have been dismissed by earlier theorists who doubted the cognitive capacity of preschoolers to recognise the less apparent features of friendship, including peers’ personal characteristics or psychological

attributes (Bigelow & La Gaipa, 1980; Selman, 1980). This can be explained by Piaget's (1972) notion of perceptual centration which posits that children have a tendency to focus on the most salient aspects, ignoring additional characteristics. Due to this supposed cognitive weakness, preschoolers were understood to focus on the most obvious features of friendship such as physical characteristics, propinquity and play (Bigelow & La Gaipa, 1980). Bigelow and La Gaipa (1980) hypothesised that children aged approximately 11 to 12 years may be capable of identifying emotional reciprocities such as loyalty as a feature of friendship. However, the present study challenges this postulation and suggests that preschoolers may, indeed, be capable of recognising loyalty amongst their peers, which may warrant a peer's nomination as a best friend.

Imitation and skills development.

Imitation and skills development was ranked ninth out of the total 14 sub-themes identified and accounted for 4.43% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$) (see Table 3). This novel sub-theme included responses such as "he copies me when we draw" (Part. 18, B, GR), "X taught me how to do a flip jump" (Part. 36, G, PGR) and "I can teach her to go upside down" (Part. 54, G, PGR). Preschoolers were found to nominate as best friends peers who were inclined to copy them during an activity and who they had taught specific skills to. Preschoolers also nominated as best friends those from whom they had learnt skills. This highlighted the use of imitation and teaching in the development of skills amongst preschool friends.

Research suggests that learning from others through imitation is common amongst children (Werebe & Baudonniere, 1988; Williamson, 2015). For example, Erikson's (1959) psychosocial developmental theory postulates that development takes place through a series of eight stages and that each stage involves accomplishing certain tasks and gaining competence in an area of life. In each stage, children are believed to confront a psychosocial conflict that

needs to be overcome to progress to the next stage (Erikson, 1959). Erikson (1959) further postulated that children aged 18 months to 3 years occupy the second stage involving the psychosocial conflict of autonomy versus shame and doubt. According to Erikson (1959), the central task during this period is imitation. Children begin to imitate others in order to learn skills and tasks essential to life (Erikson, 1959). This supports the tendency for children to imitate or copy peers during activity as found in the present study.

Moreover, in the third stage, involving children aged between 3 and 5 years, Erikson (1959) posited that the psychosocial conflict of initiative versus guilt is confronted. Throughout the third stage, children are expected to take initiative in their interactions while exploring their environment and attempting new things (Erikson, 1959). Children who develop initiative are thought to be open to taking charge in peer interactions, and may teach others new skills which they may have learnt while exploring their environment (Erikson, 1959). Moreover, Bandura's (1977, 1986) social learning theory suggests that children typically learn behaviour by observing and imitating others, which supports the idea that when children imitate their peers during play, they acquire new behaviours and skills.

Literature such as Goldstein et al. (1989) suggests that preschoolers who are friends tend to show more imitation and interactive competence during play than those who are acquaintances. Goldstein et al. (1989) found that friend dyads showed greater reciprocity and interdependence during play, allowing turn-taking and learning, as opposed to acquaintance dyads. Furthermore, preschoolers who nominated peers who copied them as best friends may have felt respected and appreciated by the peer, increasing the preschoolers' fondness for the peer. Literature has confirmed that respect is pivotal to friendships throughout life (Walker et al., 2016). Lastly, a preschooler may nominate a peer who they imitate and learn from as a best friend because they idolise the peer. This idolatry may also be associated with an elevated level of fondness for the peer (Walker et al., 2016).

6.2.3. Theme Three: Geographical associations.

Geographical associations was ranked third out of the total five themes identified and accounted for 11.33% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$) (see Table 2). This theme consisted of three sub-themes, namely *Out-of-school interaction* (4.93%); *Propinquity* (3.94%), and *Familial influence* (2.46%) (see Table 3). Preschoolers appeared to nominate peers as best friends with whom they interacted with outside of the preprimary, preschool and daycare facility, who were situated in close proximity to them in terms of classroom seating or living arrangements, and who they were encouraged to engage with due to familial influences.

Geographical associations in terms of propinquity in classroom seating and living arrangements has been found to play a pivotal role in preschoolers' friend nominations in previous studies (Lindsey, 2002; Schneider et al., 2001; Selman, 1980). For example, Selman (1980) suggested that children aged 3 to 5 years may define friends as those who live nearby. In the present study, *Out-of-school interaction* (4.93%) and *Familial influence* (2.46%) were seen as novel sub-themes as they had not been identified as factors that may influence preschoolers' nominations as a best friend in any previous international or South African studies.

Out-of-school interaction.

Out-of-school interaction was ranked seventh out of the total 14 sub-themes identified and accounted for 4.93% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$) (see Table 3). Preschoolers' associations with peers outside of the preschool environment were found to influence their nomination of peers as best friends. Responses comprising this sub-theme included "Play at his house" (Part. 38, B, PGR), "Ons speel saam by die huisie" [We play together at the house] (Part. 27, B, GR), and "She goes to my house

and I go to her house” (Part. 40, G, PGR). While studies have emphasised the importance of geographical associations in terms of classroom seating and living arrangements (Selman, 1980), no international or South African studies have identified the influence of out-of-school interaction on preschoolers’ nominations as a best friend.

In this sub-theme, preschoolers’ interactions at each other’s homes allowed for their extended interaction and increased familiarity. Doyle et al. (1980), who performed a quantitative study on 16 Canadian children, found that familiarity typically decreases children’s distress and promotes positive social interactions, including associative and cooperative play. Children were found to be more socially active and socially competent when engaging with a familiar peer (Doyle et al., 1980). Their successful social behaviours may elevate their level of attractiveness to peers (Doyle et al., 1980), making them more likely to be nominated by a peer as a best friend.

Preschoolers mentioned participating in activities at their peers’ homes that could not be performed within the preprimary, preschool and daycare facility, for example, “*X comes to my house to watch movies and eat popcorn and I go to her house*” (Part. 45, B, PGR). This indicated an increase in the amount of shared experiences between them, and according to literature, the greater the shared experiences, the greater the familiarity amongst individuals, which can support friendship development (Doyle et al., 1980; Kehily & Swann, 2003; Schneider et al., 2001). Literature such as Mendelson et al. (1994) further confirms that friendship is typically predicted by a joint history. In light of this, the shared experiences and unique joint history experienced by the preschoolers in the present study may have promoted the development of their friendship and the best friend nomination.

This increased familiarity may be accounted for by Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 1979) ecological systems theory. The second system of Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 1979) ecological model is the mesosystem, referring to the relationship between two or more environments in

which the child develops. This may include, for example, the relationship between the preschooler's home and the nominated best friend's home. Similar home environments may increase the level of familiarity between preschoolers by exposing similar ways of living and family set-ups. As stated, familiarity has been hypothesised to promote friendships amongst children (Doyle et al., 1980), and, as suggested by the present study, the possibility of being nominated as a best friend.

Propinquity.

Propinquity in terms of preschoolers' classroom seating or living arrangements was ranked tenth out of the total 14 sub-themes identified. It accounted for 3.94% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$) (see Table 3). Common responses related to propinquity included "*We sit together*" (Part. 11, B, GR), "*We in the same class*" (Part. 45, B, PGR) and "*Because we live by each other*" (Part. 61, B, PGR).

Researchers such as Bigelow and La Gaipa (1980) and Selman (1980) have declared that propinquity as outlined in the present study influences preschoolers' friend nominations. For example, Selman (1980) postulated that children aged 3 to 5 years typically define friends as those who live nearby. Similarly, Bigelow and La Gaipa (1980) found that children distinguished best friends from acquaintances based on the fact that the former lived close by. To date, no South African studies have investigated the influence of proximity in terms of classroom seating and living arrangements on preschoolers' best friend nominations.

Propinquity has been thought to have an influential effect on friendships between people of all ages, races and social classes (Nisbett et al., 2005). Some literature, for example, Nisbett et al. (2005), relies on the general propinquity-attraction hypothesis to explain this. This hypothesis states that the closer the proximity between two individuals, the more likely they are to be attracted to one another (Segal, 1974). This could be relevant in the establishment

of cross-group friendships in a South African context. Although the South African Apartheid regime ended in 1994, discriminatory attitudes and intergroup conflicts still seem to occur in current times. Allport's (1954) intergroup contact theory may be beneficial to consider when thinking of strategies to overcome this.

Intergroup contact is thought to reduce prejudice between diverse groups and enhance liking (Allport, 1954). The greater the proximity between individuals from diverse groups, the more likely they are thought to interact with and understand one another in addition to developing a sense of liking or fondness for one another (Pettigrew et al., 2011). The preschool sample in the present study was culturally and racially diverse, consisting of children from three major ethnic groups in the Western Cape, namely the White, Coloured and Black communities. It might be interesting to examine Allport's (1954) intergroup contact theory in relation to the best friendships of a diverse preschool population in future South African studies. This theory may allow for a better understanding in helping to design interventions aimed at promoting cross-cultural friendships amongst South African preschoolers, and may play a pivotal role in reducing discriminatory attitudes amongst them.

Familial Influence.

Familial influence was ranked eleventh out of the total 14 sub-themes identified and accounted for 2.46% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$) (see Table 3). To date, few studies have looked at the manner in which families may influence preschoolers' friendships. Moreover, no international or South African studies have identified how this may determine preschoolers' nominations as a best friend. In the present study, *Familial influence* referred to the way in which family members were found to either directly or indirectly initiate and maintain preschoolers' friendships with particular peers.

As a part of the child's microsystem, that is, the direct environment of the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), parents may have a dominant influence on preschoolers' friendships. This is seen in instances where parents monitor who their children play with, impacting who that child develops a friendship with (Rubin & Sloman, 1984). Parents may arrange playdates with peers they think their children do or should get along with, and might not always take their children's preferences into consideration (Rubin & Sloman, 1984). Furthermore, parents may arrange playdates with peers when they need to attend to a task (Rubin & Sloman, 1984), which may relate to the response "*My ma se ek moet na X se huis toe gaan*" [*My mom said that I must go to X's house*] (Part. 67, B, PGR) in the present study.

In another example of familial influence in the present study, a preschooler nominated a peer as a best friend because that peer was familiar with the preschooler's grandad and had visited him often. This association and the resulting sense of familiarity may have elevated the preschooler's liking for the peer, promoting their friendship (Doyle et al., 1980). This is supported by Doyle et al. (1980) who stated that preschoolers who are familiar with one another tend to play together more often and engage in more positive social interactions. When the peer visited the preschooler's grandad and the preschooler was able to interact with him or her, it allowed for more frequent interaction, and possibly greater familiarity and shared experiences, which are all considered crucial to friendships (Mendelson et al., 1994), and, as suggested by the present study, to preschoolers' nominations as a best friend.

A final example of familial influence in the present study involved the following response, "*She is so special just like my brother*" (Part. 36, G, PGR). The preschooler appeared to have identified a similarity between her brother and peer, which may have encouraged the preschooler to feel more familiar and comfortable with the nominated peer. The familiarity may have promoted the preschooler's positive social interaction with the peer, supporting their friendship development and fondness (Doyle et al., 1980). According to Bronfenbrenner's

(1977, 1979) ecological systems theory, siblings, like parents, constitute the child's microsystem and may have a dominant influence on child development. In this study, it became apparent that siblings may have an indirect influence on preschoolers' best friend nominations.

6.2.4. Theme Four: Similarity amongst preschoolers.

Similarity amongst preschoolers was ranked third out of the total five themes identified and accounted for 11.33% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$) (see Table 2). Studies have provided support for the hypothesis that similarity underlies attraction and is a key component of friendship (Byrne, 1971). According to Piaget (1971, 1972), preschoolers who occupy the preoperational phase of development are typically egocentric and thus struggle to comprehend the viewpoints of others. Their perceptions of self and others tend to encompass an all-or-none thinking and they generally display a global preference for those who are like them (Piaget, 1972).

Studies on friendship nominations have shown that preschoolers attribute importance to similarities between themselves and peers on dimensions including physical appearance; behavioural tendencies such as play styles; possessions; tastes and interests, as well as demographic variables such as gender, ethnicity and race (DeRosier et al., 1994; Deutz et al., 2015; Sebanc et al., 2007). However, similarity in behavioural tendencies did not emerge in the present study. Preschoolers rather selected peers as best friends who were similar to themselves in terms of tastes and interests (8.87%), skills (0.99%), possessions (0.99%), as well as physical appearance with regards to race (0.49%) (see Table 3). *Similarity in skills* was considered a novel sub-theme as no previous international or South African studies were found to have identified this as a factor that may influence preschoolers' nominations as a best friend.

Similarity in tastes and interests.

Similarity in tastes and interests was ranked third out of the total 14 sub-themes identified and accounted for 8.87% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$) (see Table 3). This type of similarity has been considered central to preschoolers' friendship nominations across studies (Erwin, 1985; Rekalidou & Petrogiannis, 2012; Sebanc et al., 2007). For example, according to Rekalidou and Petrogiannis (2012), who studied the selection and rejection criteria used by 70 Greek preschoolers when choosing their friends, 'common interests' was found to be a key reason for friendship selection (p. 179).

Preschoolers, who are typically egocentric, are understood to display a preference for those who are like them (Piaget, 1972). Further, a fondness for peers who have similar tastes and interests may be supported by the notion of 'homophily', that is, the tendency for like-minded individuals to be attracted to one another (Farmer & Farmer, 1996, p. 443). Children who are like-minded (possibly sharing tastes and interests) are perceived to get along better and have less conflictual relationships (Farmer & Farmer, 1996). Writers such as Erwin (1985) suggest that children who have interests that are considerably different to those of the mainstream peer group tend to be nominated as friends less often. These children typically battle to collaborate with others and may even be rejected (Erwin, 1985). Thus, having similar tastes and interests to peers may assist preschoolers in developing friendships and, as found in the present study, may elevate the likelihood that they may be nominated as a best friend.

Contradicting this conclusion are researchers such as Selman (1980), who did not consider similarity in tastes and interests to be important to children's best friendships. Selman (1980) postulated that these similarities are generally only recognised by children aged between 11 and 15 years. The present study's findings challenged this postulation as not only were similarities in tastes and interests identified and referred to by the preschoolers aged 4 to 6

years, they were found to be a dominant determinant of the preschoolers' best friend nominations. This is supported by the fact that the sub-theme *Similarity in tastes and interests* was ranked within the top five sub-themes in the study.

Similarity in skills.

Similarity in skills was ranked twelfth out of the total 14 sub-themes identified and accounted for 0.99% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$) (see Table 3). Two responses in this study could be analysed under *Similarity in skills*, namely “*X kan ook baie mooi inkleur, soos ek*” [*X can also colour in very nicely, like me*] (Part. 31, G, GR) and “*Both of us can jungle*” (Part. 56, G, PGR). As far as the researcher could ascertain, a similarity in skills was not identified as a factor that influenced preschoolers' nominations as a best friend in previous international or South African studies, and could therefore be considered novel.

As mentioned, Erikson's (1959) psychosocial developmental theory states that children between the ages of 3 to 5 years typically confront the psychosocial conflict of initiative versus guilt. Children these ages are expected to explore their environment, and plan and attempt novel activities, success in which may lead to the establishment of initiative, while failure may result in guilt and self-doubt (Erikson, 1959). Preschoolers who have developed and performed a skill successfully may establish initiative and confidence (Erikson, 1959). This may encourage them to perform the skill in a social setting where they could possibly identify a similarity with other peers who may be able to perform the same skill. Identifying this similarity may promote a sense of commonality between the preschoolers in terms of shared experiences, further promoting friendship (Mendelson et al., 1994).

Recognition that a peer is as skilled as themselves in a particular activity may create feelings of respect towards that peer, which literature has confirmed is pivotal to friendships

throughout life (Walker et al., 2016). Preschoolers who share a skill may practice the skill together and possibly even imitate one another. As previously discussed, imitation has been found to be common amongst preschool friends (Goldstein et al., 1989). Through imitation, preschoolers' recognition of skill similarity may either be strengthened or undermined, depending on the performance of each preschooler. If recognition of skill similarity is compounded, the friendship may be strengthened as, according to Piaget (1972), preschoolers tend to favour those who are similar to themselves. This confirms the present study's finding that a peer who is identified to have similar skills may be nominated by a preschooler as a best friend.

Similarity in possessions.

Similarity in possessions was ranked twelfth out of the total 14 sub-themes identified and accounted for 0.99% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$) (see Table 3). Two responses belonged to this sub-theme, namely "*Because she also gets a sticker*" (Part. 37, G, PGR) and "*Also because she has the same boots like me*" (Part. 47, G, PGR). Piaget's (1972) concepts of perceptual centration and egocentrism, as previously discussed, may explain this. According to these, it can be considered normal for preschoolers to favour friends who have the same concrete, observable possessions as them. Previous international studies such as McNamara (2007) have found that preschoolers' friendship choices may be influenced by a similarity in possessions. However, McNamara (2007) did not find this similarity to be a dominant predictor of preschoolers' friend selections. This mirrors the findings of the present study, which found that similarity in possessions was not a popular determinant of preschoolers' best friend selections. Rather, other sub-themes such as *General play* (8.87%) influenced preschoolers' best friend nominations more.

Similarity in physical appearance.

Similarity in physical appearance was ranked fourteenth out of the total 14 sub-themes identified and accounted for 0.49% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$) (see Table 3). Only one response comprised this sub-theme, namely “Want hy is bruin net soos ek” [*Because he is brown just like me*] (Part. 25, B, GR). The preschooler referred to the peer’s skin colour, and thus to race.

Preschoolers are thought to use observable features to categorise themselves and others (Cairns et al., 1988; Hallinan, 1980; Ramsey & Myers, 1990). Piaget’s (1971, 1972) notions of perceptual centration supports this, as well as his claim that preschoolers show a preference for those who are similar to themselves. Furthermore, similar physical appearance has been found to impact preschoolers’ friendship selections in numerous studies (e.g. Fawcett & Markson, 2010; Sanefuji, 2013). For example, Sanefuji (2013) performed a quantitative study on 32 4-year-olds and 30 5-year-olds in Japan and determined that a similarity in physical appearance strongly influenced friendship selection.

International researchers such as Barron (2011), Fawcett and Markson (2010), Fishbein and Imai (1993), and Graham and Cohen (1997) have found similarity in race to impact preschoolers’ friendship choices. A South African study by Exenberger (2003) similarly found race to impact a South African group of preschoolers’ friendship choices. Children as young as 3 years are thought to be aware of race and are believed to display own-race bias stemming from egocentrism, preferring same-race peers as friends (Graham & Cohen, 1997). This supposed own-race bias appeared to be evident in the present study, with the only response in this sub-theme referring to the race of a peer. Based on research, *Similarity in physical appearance* was expected to appear more prominently in this study. Instead, this sub-theme was ranked fourteenth out of the total 14 sub-themes. It is interesting to note that both the sub-themes *Physical attractiveness* and *Similarity in physical appearance* were not found to be as

common as was initially anticipated in this study. This suggests that a South African preschool population may differ from an international one in terms of physical features as factors that may influence their nominations as best friends. This highlights the caution that should be taken when generalising results from international to South African contexts.

6.2.5. Theme Five: General fondness.

General fondness was ranked fifth out of the total five themes and accounted for 7.39% of the total number of responses pertaining to the first research question ($n = 203$) (see Table 2). This theme did not comprise any sub-themes, but included responses such as “*Because I like her*” (Part. 58, G, PGR), “*Because I love her*” (Part. 51, G, PGR), “*Because she likes me*” (Part. 10, G, GR), and “*She loves me*” (Part. 12, B, GR). This supports the fact that preschoolers nominated peers as best friends because they liked or loved them with no particular reason for that liking or loving. They also selected peers as best friends who they perceived to like and love them.

According to LaFontana and Cillessen (2002), the prerequisite for the nomination of a peer as a best friend is likeability or positive regard. The greater the fondness for a peer, the more likely the peer is to be nominated as a best friend (Lund et al., 2016). In a study by Field et al. (1994), liking was found to be the most common reason for having a friend alongside play. Furthermore, liking and appreciating the individual’s perceived qualities has been considered pivotal to friend selection (Lund et al., 2016). In light of this, it is not surprising that *General Fondness* emerged as a theme of preschoolers’ best friend nominations.

6.3. Differences in the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes according to gender

The next section will discuss the significant differences in the frequency of responses for the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes according to gender. These differences are important to consider because of the impact research has shown that gender has had on

friendships (Abdi, 2010; Benozio & Diesendruck, 2015; Goldstein et al., 2002; Markovits et al., 2001).

6.3.1. Differences in the best friend nomination themes according to gender.

As seen in Table 4, one significant difference in the frequency of responses for the best friend nomination themes according to gender was found for *Geographical associations* ($p = .003$).

Geographical associations.

Boys referred to the *Geographical associations* theme ($p = .003$) significantly more than girls when nominating a peer as a best friend (see Table 4). This suggests that boys attribute greater importance to geographical ties with peers when selecting peers as best friends. Upon further analysis of this theme, it became apparent that only one significant gender difference in the frequency of responses existed for the three sub-themes that comprised *Geographical associations*. As seen in Table 5, this was found for the *Propinquity* sub-theme ($p = .001$), and will be discussed in the next section.

6.3.2. Differences in the best friend nomination sub-themes according to gender.

As seen in Table 5, significant differences in the frequency of responses for two sub-themes, namely *Socially positive traits and behaviour* ($p = .003$) and *Propinquity* ($p = .001$) were found according to gender.

Socially positive traits and behaviour.

Girls referred to the sub-theme *Socially positive traits and behaviour* ($p = .003$) significantly more than boys when providing a reason for nominating a peer as a best friend (see Table 5). This finding suggested that girls regarded socially positive traits and behaviour such as kindness, care, helpfulness, sharing and a good sense of humour, more highly in their

peers than boys did. This could be attributed to the fact that girls may be more attracted to these qualities, identifying these more often, which can be explained by gender-role development.

Louw and Louw (2014) refer to gender-role development as the “development of gendered behaviours and attitudes” (p. 195). It is thought to involve three processes, namely the establishment of gender identity, the procurement of gender stereotypes, and the acquisition of gender-typed behaviours (Louw & Louw, 2014). Once children identify themselves as male or female at approximately 2 to 3 years of age (the establishment of gender identity), they are believed to become conscious of gender stereotypes (the procurement of gender stereotypes) (Louw & Louw, 2014). For example, they may recognise that blue is generally associated with boys and pink with girls. Children typically internalise these stereotypes and develop internal working models of gender, assuming society’s understanding of what acceptable and unacceptable behaviour for each gender is (the acquisition of gender-typed behaviours) (Baldwin, 1992). These gender-typed behaviours, which are believed to define the typical girl and boy, are commonly learnt through observing and imitating others (Markovits et al., 2001).

This is supported by Bandura’s (1977, 1986) social learning theory, which postulates that youngsters learn vicariously by observing and modelling the behaviour of parents, siblings, teachers, peers and television characters, for example. While girls are generally expected to be empathetic, prosocial, caring, soft and affectionate in their interactions, it is considered more acceptable for boys to be boisterous, physical and loud (Abdi, 2010). This sex-specific socialisation could be the reason girls regard aggressive behaviour as more unacceptable than boys do, while boys perceive antisocial peers as satisfactory (Goldstein et al., 2002). Girls who are expected to be sensitive and caring may therefore exhibit a greater number of socially positive traits and behaviours than boys. This is evident in studies such as Abdi (2010), who explored gender differences in the social skills of 610 Iranian preschoolers aged 5 to 6 years

and 6 months. Abdi (2010) found that on average, girls were rated higher than boys in terms of positive behaviours and social skills.

Furthermore, Markovits et al. (2001) found that girls' friendships tend to be more intimate in comparison to boys' friendships. While boys favoured activity over speech, girls seemed to prefer sitting and talking to peers (Markovits et al., 2001). In two studies on individual-regarding and group-regarding preferences amongst preschoolers aged 3 to 6 years, Benozio and Diesendruck (2015) found that boys displayed a stronger preference for group-regarding preferences than girls did. This was explained by boys' more frequent engagement in competitive group interactions based on status goals including dominance and revenge, while girls appear to have peer relationships that involve social support and mutual participation (Rose & Rudolph, as cited in Benozio & Diesendruck, 2015).

These differences in girls' and boys' interactions may explain why, in the present study, girls were found to pay more attention to the socially positive traits and behaviours of their peers. Through gender stereotypes, girls may have learnt that affection, kindness and care should define the way in which they engage with peers. Consequently, they may have been more likely to nominate peers as best friends according to the *Socially positive traits and behaviour* sub-theme than boys were.

Propinquity.

As seen in Table 5, *Propinquity* ($p = .001$) was found to be more common amongst boys than girls. This finding suggested that being in close proximity, either in terms of classroom seating or living arrangements, was more important to boys' nominations of peers as best friends than it was to girls' nominations. This finding is significant as no previous studies have found propinquity to be more important to one gender than to another. Most studies, for example Cairns et al. (1988), have declared propinquity to be a factor underlying

both preschool boys' and girls' selections of peers as friends. One explanation which may support the present study's finding could be the difference in nature of each gender's peer interactions.

Since boys have been considered to be more physical in their interactions with peers (e.g. Abdi, 2010; Markovits et al., 2001; Rose & Rudolph, as cited in Benozio & Diesendruck, 2015), physical proximity may be more important to their friendships. Boys tend to be more boisterous and show a preference for rough, physical activities such as touching, throwing, pushing, tackling and wrestling (Abdi, 2010, Markovits et al., 2001). Contrarily, girls engage less in rough, physical play and their friendships appear to be based more upon emotion (Markovits et al., 2001). This reinforces the idea that physical contact and proximity may be less important to girls than to boys in terms of their best friend nominations.

6.4. Differences in the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes between class groups

As can be seen in Table 6 and Table 7, there were no significant differences in the frequency of responses for the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes between the two class groups, namely Pre-Grade R (4 years to 4 years and 11 months) and Grade R (5 years to 5 years and 11 months). While no significant differences had been anticipated in the themes, it was expected that significant differences would be displayed in two sub-themes. These expectations will be discussed below.

6.4.1. Differences in the best friend nomination themes between class groups.

As can be seen in Table 6, no significant differences were found in the frequency of responses for the best friend nomination themes between the two class groups. Previous literature has reported positive individual traits (Sebanc et al., 2007), personal characteristics (such as physical attractiveness) (Hawley et al., 2007), play (Furman & Bierman, 1983),

geographical associations (mainly in terms of propinquity) (Selman, 1980), similarity (Rekalidou & Petrogiannis, 2012) and fondness (Field et al., 1994, Lund et al., 2016) to be factors that may influence the friendship nominations of preschoolers aged 4 to 6 years. In light of this literature, no significant differences were expected between the two class groups with regards to the five themes, *Personal characteristics and psychological attributes* ($p = .959$), *Play and shared activities* ($p = .261$), *Geographical associations* ($p = .076$), *Similarity amongst preschoolers* ($p = .190$) and *General fondness* ($p = .102$).

6.4.2. Differences in the best friend nomination sub-themes between class groups.

As can be seen in Table 7, no significant differences in the frequency of responses for the best friend nomination sub-themes were found between the two class groups. It was expected that significant differences in the frequency of responses for two out of the 14 sub-themes would be found, namely *Socially positive traits and behaviour* ($p = .664$) and *Imitation and skills development* ($p = .966$).

Firstly, according to developmental literature such as Louw and Louw (2014), prosocial behaviour first becomes apparent by the ages of 2 to 3 years and becomes more prominent with age. According to Piaget (1965), children's thinking about their own and others' actions becomes more sophisticated from the age of 4 onwards. Their prosocial behaviour tends to increase as they learn about the consequences of their own and others' actions through their peer interactions (Piaget, 1965). Peers can provide feedback on the significance of prosocial behaviours and offer contexts to practise these (Piaget, 1965). The more experience children have in social settings, the more likely they are to become aware of the importance of prosocial behaviours and to display these (Piaget, 1965). It is understood that older children, typically having more experience in social contexts, may exhibit prosocial behaviour more often than younger children (Piaget, 1965). They may have a better understanding of the consequences of their behaviour. Furthermore, they may have a more developed moral conscience (Louw &

Louw, 2014). This means that they may have a better understanding of what is right and what is wrong, and may behave accordingly (Louw & Louw, 2014). In light of the above, it was anticipated that the sub-theme *Socially positive traits and behaviour* would be significantly more common amongst the older Grade R class group than amongst the younger Pre-Grade R class group as a factor that influenced their best friend nominations.

Secondly, according to Erikson's (1959) psychosocial developmental theory, children aged 18 months to 3 years confront the psychosocial conflict of autonomy versus shame and doubt. Erikson (1959) regards imitation to be the central task during this period. Children are thought to imitate others in order to learn skills and tasks essential to life (Erikson, 1959). Interestingly, studies have found imitation to be common amongst preschool friends older than 3 years. For example, Goldstein et al. (1989), who performed an international study involving 24 children aged 2 to 5 years, found that friend dyads showed a greater amount of imitation as opposed to acquaintance dyads. In light of these findings, and Erikson's (1959) psychosocial theory, it was assumed that *Imitation and skills development* would be significantly more common as a factor that influenced best friend nominations amongst the younger Pre-Grade R class group (4 years to 4 years and 11 months) in the present study, being closer to the age of 3, than the older Grade R class group.

6.5. Peer status amongst preschoolers

The second research question aimed to determine whether there were any distinguishing characteristics amongst preschoolers who received more peer nominations (high peer status preschoolers) compared to those who received fewer peer nominations (low peer status preschoolers). First, significant differences in the frequency of responses for the best friend nominations themes and sub-themes between the peer status groups are discussed. Second, the notable differences in the best friend nomination sub-theme content between these two groups will be addressed.

6.5.1. Differences in the best friend nomination themes between peer status groups.

As seen in Table 8, no significant differences were found in the frequency of responses for the best friend nomination themes for the high and low peer status groups. This finding implied that the five themes identified, namely *Personal characteristics and psychological attributes* ($p = .624$); *Play and shared activities* ($p = .303$); *Geographical associations* ($p = .407$); *Similarity amongst preschoolers* ($p = .690$), and *General fondness* ($p = .622$) were referred to in preschoolers' nominations of both high peer status and low peer status peers as best friends. Thus, both peer status groups of preschoolers were nominated as best friends according to these five best friend nomination themes.

6.5.2. Differences in the best friend nomination sub-themes between peer status groups.

One significant difference was found in the frequency of responses for the best friend nomination sub-themes between the high peer status and low peer status groups. This difference was found in the *General play* sub-theme ($p = .041$) (see Table 9). It was surprising that no other significant differences were found as previous studies on peer status amongst preschoolers have highlighted numerous differences between the two peer status groups (Howes & Matheson, 1992; Nelson et al., 2016; Newcomb et al., 1993; Sachkova, 2014). Some of the most popular of these differences involve preschoolers' socially positive traits and behaviour (Nelson et al., 2016; Walker, 2009), play and shared activities (Sachkova, 2014), and physical appearance (Hawley et al., 2007). These will now be discussed.

In terms of preschoolers' socially positive traits and behaviour, literature has shown that high peer status preschoolers tend to be more prosocial in comparison to low peer status preschoolers (Denham et al., 1990; Walker, 2009). High peer status preschoolers seem to

display frequent positive behaviours for example smiling, and are often considered to be more sensitive, considerate, friendly and helpful (Newcomb et al., 1993). Denham et al. (1990) found that the knowledge of emotional display rules, the presentation of prosocial behaviour, and an elevated peer status were positively related. They postulated that those with a high peer status tended to understand emotions better, were more affectionate and were likely to respond appropriately to peers (Denham et al., 1990).

On the other hand, low peer status preschoolers are often less social and less responsive (Sachkova, 2014). According to Nelson et al. (2016) and Walker (2009), low peer status preschoolers may display neutral or negative affect more often than positive affect. In light of the above, a significant difference in the frequency of responses for the sub-theme *Socially positive traits and behaviour* ($p = .188$) between the peer status groups was expected in the present study. High peer status preschoolers were expected to be nominated as best friends according to *Socially positive traits and behaviour* significantly more than low peer status preschoolers as they have been documented in international literature to be more prosocial than their low peer status counterparts (Newcomb et al., 1993). However, this was not found in this study. This suggested that perhaps socially positive traits and behaviour may be characteristic of preschoolers belonging to both peer status groups within the South African context.

Significant differences in the frequency of responses for three out of the total four sub-themes comprising the theme *Play and shared activities* were anticipated for the peer status groups but not found. These sub-themes included *Shared specific play* ($p = .826$), *Dedicated play* ($p = .620$) and *Imitation and skills development* ($p = .528$) (see Table 9).

Firstly, it was assumed that the high peer status preschoolers would be nominated as best friends according to the sub-theme *Shared specific play* ($p = .827$) significantly more than the low peer status preschoolers. *Shared specific play* included responses regarding preschoolers' participation in specific play activities. Although play is understood to be a key

component of preschoolers' friendships regardless of peer status (Vygotsky, 1976), high peer status preschoolers, who have been considered to be more socially competent, have also been understood to be more successful at initiating and maintaining play activities. They have been suggested to manifest more developed motor skills, which encourages their involvement in an array of activities (Lindsey, 2014; Sachkova, 2014). They have also been believed to manifest more advanced game skills, which may promote their participation in more complicated and exciting games and activities (Howes & Matheson, 1992; Lindsey, 2014). Low peer status preschoolers tend to manifest less developed game skills, less confidence and favour non-social play, which may limit their participation in activities with peers (Walker, 2009). In light of the above, it was interesting to note that high peer status preschoolers were not nominated as best friends according to the *Shared specific play* sub-theme significantly more than low peer status preschoolers in the present study.

In terms of the sub-theme *Dedicated play* ($p = .620$), it was expected that high peer status preschoolers would be nominated as best friends according to this sub-theme significantly more than low peer status preschoolers. However, this was not found. *Dedicated play* included preschoolers' responses of how the nominated best friend had chosen to play with them, either frequently or for a lengthy period. According to studies such as Denham et al. (1990), high peer status preschoolers tend to display more socially positive traits and behaviour, including qualities such as loyalty, commitment, dedication and aspirations to make others feel loved and cared for. This could result in a high peer status preschooler paying greater attention to peers in play, and playing with particular peers often or for a lengthy duration to ensure their peers' happiness. Low peer status preschoolers are considered to be less emotionally responsive (Nelson et al., 2016), and tend to be engaged in non-social play (Walker, 2009). They might not choose to play with a particular peer frequently or for a lengthy duration. Therefore, in the present study, it was speculated that low peer status preschoolers

would be nominated as best friends according *Dedicated play* significantly less than their high peer status counterparts who have been understood to be more affectionate.

In terms of *Imitation and skills development* ($p = .528$), it was anticipated that the high peer status preschoolers would be nominated as best friends according to this sub-theme significantly more than the low peer status preschoolers. Interestingly, this was not found. *Imitation and skills development* included preschoolers' nominations of peers as best friends who imitated them during activities or who they imitated. Researchers such as Sachkova (2014) have stated that high peer status preschoolers tend to be more confident and socially competent. They seem to manifest more developed game skills and cognitive abilities, and tend to lead games and take initiative in peer interactions (Johnson et al., 2000; Sachkova, 2014). Low peer status preschoolers are thought to manifest less developed game skills and confidence, and have been considered less likely to take initiative or to lead peers in activity (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003; Sachkova, 2014). In light of these findings, it was expected that high peer status preschoolers would be more likely than low peer status preschoolers to teach peers skills, games and activities, and thus would be nominated as best friends according to the sub-theme *Imitation and skills development* significantly more than low peer status peers.

Furthermore, according to Johnson et al. (2000), high peer status preschoolers' confidence may encourage them to explore their environment and be more social, making them more likely to confront others and learn from them (Newcomb et al., 1993). Thus, in addition to teaching peers, high peer status preschoolers may be more open to imitating and learning from peers. This can be explained by Bowlby's (1958) attachment theory. Bowlby (1958) postulates that the nature of children's attachment (secure versus insecure) to the primary caregiver may impact their confidence to explore their environment and learn. Children who are securely attached to their caregiver are more confident and social (Bowlby, 1958). High peer status preschoolers, who have been considered to be both confident and social, are likely

to be securely attached, and were thus expected to be more likely to explore unfamiliar environments and be open to engaging with and learning from others. This further supported the present study's assumption that high peer status preschoolers would be nominated as best friends according to *Imitation and skills development* significantly more than low peer status preschoolers. This assumption was not found to be true following the analysis of archival data.

Lastly, a significant difference in the frequency of responses for the *Physical attractiveness* sub-theme ($p = .927$) was expected to be found between the peer status groups. Literature has posited that preschoolers who are attractive tend to be nominated as friends more often than those who are not (Brendgen & Boivin, 2011; Hawley et al., 2007; Sebanc, 2003). A positive relationship between attractiveness and popularity has been recorded amongst preschoolers (Brendgen & Boivin, 2011). For example, Hawley et al. (2007) found that preschoolers' physical attractiveness was correlated with positive peer regard and an elevated peer status. In terms of these findings, it was anticipated that the high peer status preschoolers would be nominated as best friends according to *Physical attractiveness* significantly more than the low peer status preschoolers in the present study. It was interesting that this was not found and suggests that physical attractiveness may not be related to status amongst a South African preschool sample in ways that it has been related to status in international samples.

General play.

As mentioned, the only significant difference in the frequency of responses for the best friend nomination sub-themes between the peer status groups was found for *General play* ($p = .041$) (see Table 9). *General play* included responses such as “*we play together*” (Part. 34, G, PGR), where no reference was made to a particular activity or to the nature of play.

The difference found for *General play* proposed that low peer status preschoolers were significantly more likely than high peer status preschoolers to be engaged in play of a general

nature. According to literature, low peer status preschoolers, who are often less social, tend to be engaged in non-social play, including unoccupied, solitary or parallel play (Walker, 2009). As they prefer to play alone or with few friends, they may be reluctant to engage in activities that may attract peers' attention (Newcomb et al., 1993; Walker, 2009). They may prefer to participate in standard or familiar games. In addition, these preschoolers have been shown to lack developed games skills and tend to be less confident (Sachkova, 2014). They may thus avoid popular games, which are thought to involve intricate rules and often require advanced motor skills (Walker, 2009). In light of the above, it is understandable that low peer status preschoolers were nominated as best friends according to *General play* significantly more than high peer status preschoolers in the present study. It may be more likely that they may be engaged in play of a general nature or identified as merely playing as opposed to high peer status preschoolers who may be more outgoing and involved in popular, possibly labelled, activities.

6.5.3. Differences in the best friend nomination sub-theme content between peer status groups.

The only notable differences in the best friend nomination sub-theme content between high peer status and low peer status preschoolers were found in the sub-theme *Socially positive traits and behaviour*.

Socially positive traits and behaviour.

A qualitative comparison of preschoolers' reasons for nominating peers as best friends revealed that high peer status preschoolers displayed a wider range of socially positive traits and behaviour than low peer status preschoolers. Low peer status preschoolers were described as kind and were suggested to have helped peers with activities, as well as shared their food and play equipment. High peer status preschoolers were described in the same way, but were

also said to have taken turns during activities, communicated politely and competently, helped peers when they were hurt, and were defined as loving. This finding was supported by literature which stated that high peer status preschoolers are more socially sensitive, pay greater attention to turn-taking during activities, manifest a higher level of communicative competence and are generally more helpful than low peer status preschoolers (Howes & Matheson, 1992; Newcomb et al., 1993).

High peer status preschoolers have been described as more socially, emotionally and cognitively competent (Denham et al., 1990). Researchers have posited that they better understand others and engage with peers in a more meaningful way than their low peer status counterparts (Newcomb et al., 1993). Consequently, they may be perceived as more affectionate, friendly and considerate (Newcomb et al., 1993). High peer status preschoolers were also found to be nominated as best friends according to their inclination to be humorous through their actions in the current study. For example, “*she always pulls my finger, pulls my legs and plays jokes*” (Part. 41, G, PGR) and “*he tickles me*” (Part. 6, B, GR). Low peer status preschoolers were not identified to engage in this type of physical humour. Literature has suggested that children who maintain a good sense of humour are generally better liked and more often nominated as friends (Eivers et al., 2012).

Moreover, verbal humour was also found to be particular to high peer status preschoolers, seen in responses such as “*says funny words*” (Part. 35, G, PGR). Verbal humour refers to the manipulation of word sounds, and draws upon the developmental interest in language sounds at the preschool age (McGhee, 1979). The manipulation of word sounds requires the use of creativity and advanced cognitive abilities (Guo et al., 2011). It could be speculated that high peer status preschoolers may be more creative and have more developed cognitive abilities than low peer status preschoolers.

6.6. Chapter summary

Chapter 6 discussed the results of the current study. The chapter commenced with a discussion of the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes according to which the preschoolers nominated peers as best friends. Thereafter, significant differences in the frequency of responses for the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes were discussed according to gender and class group. This was followed by a discussion of the significant differences in the frequency of responses for the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes between peer status groups. Finally, notable differences in the best friend nomination sub-theme content between high peer status and low peer status groups were discussed. The next chapter presents the conclusion to the study. It includes a summary of the results, a critical review of the study including the limitations as well as aspects that added value. It also presents recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study aimed to obtain a better understanding of best friend nominations and peer status amongst a South African sample of preschoolers. Literature has suggested that friendships are important to preschoolers' mental, emotional and physical well-being, and contribute to their social and cognitive development (Denham & Brown, 2010; Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003; Halle & Darling-Churchill, 2016). Despite these developmental benefits, research on friendships amongst preschoolers in the South African context is scarce. Furthermore, South African studies on best friendships amongst preschoolers are largely non-existent. Understanding friendships amongst preschoolers in a South African context may help to design interventions aimed at promoting friendship amongst them, thereby supporting their holistic development.

The research aims of this study were twofold: (i) to identify the factors that influenced preschoolers' nominations as a best friend amongst a sample of preschoolers (aged 4 to 6 years) from a preprimary, preschool and daycare facility in Stellenbosch, Western Cape Province, South Africa, and (ii) to determine whether there were any distinguishing characteristics amongst preschoolers receiving more peer nominations (high peer status preschoolers) compared to those receiving fewer peer nominations (low peer status preschoolers).

7.1. Main findings of the study

7.1.1. Factors that influenced preschoolers' nominations as a best friend.

Five best friend nomination themes were found to influence preschoolers' nominations as a best friend. These were *Personal characteristics and psychological attributes* (37.44%); *Play and shared activities* (32.51%); *Geographical associations* (11.33%); *Similarity amongst preschoolers* (11.33%), and *General fondness* (7.39%). These themes were adequately

supported by previous literature on preschoolers' friendship nominations (e.g. Field et al., 1994; Lund et al., 2016; Ogelman & Secer, 2012; Rekalidou & Petrogiannis, 2012; Selman, 1980). Fourteen best friend nomination sub-themes were found, the most prominent being *Socially positive traits and behaviour* (27.09%). Seven sub-themes were identified as novel, namely *Shared specific play* (13.79%), *General play* (8.87%), *Dedicated play* (5.42%), *Imitation and skills development* (4.43%), *Out-of-school interaction* (4.93%), *Familial influence* (2.46%), and *Similarity in skills* (0.99%). These were declared novel as they had not been identified in any previous international or South African studies as factors that may influence preschoolers' nominations as a best friend.

No significant differences in the frequency of responses for the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes according to class group (Pre-Grade R and Grade R) were found. However, significant differences were found for gender, particularly for the *Geographical associations* ($p = .003$) theme and *Propinquity* ($p = .001$) sub-theme, where boys nominated peers as best friends according to these significantly more, and for the *Socially positive traits and behaviour* ($p = .003$) sub-theme, where girls nominated peers as best friends according to this sub-theme significantly more.

7.1.2. Distinguishing characteristics amongst preschoolers based on peer status.

No significant differences in the frequency of responses for the best friend nomination themes were found between the high peer status and low peer status groups. There was, however, a significant difference in the frequency of responses for the sub-theme *General play* ($p = .041$) where low peer status preschoolers were nominated as best friends according to *General play* significantly more than high peer status preschoolers. Notable differences in the content of the best friend nomination sub-theme *Socially positive traits and behaviour* were found between the peer status groups. High peer status preschoolers were found to display a wider repertoire of prosocial traits and behaviour than low peer status preschoolers.

7.2. Critical review of the study

The current study is the first to explore best friend nominations and peer status amongst preschoolers within the South African context. Several limitations and valuable aspects of the study are addressed below.

7.2.1. Limitations of the study.

In the present study, two main limitations were identified and are mentioned below. Firstly, in terms of quantifying the responses, the study involved a relatively small sample size of 58 preschoolers, which meant that the results could not be generalised to apply to the total South African preschool population. However, the participation of the 58 preschoolers did render rich qualitative responses that were believed to add value to the study, and that could provide a basis for studies that aim to obtain more general results. Secondly, due to the nature of the archival data and ethical considerations of confidentiality, no background information for the preschoolers could be obtained. This meant that conclusions could not be made according to ethnic group or socio-economic status.

7.2.2. Valuable aspects of the study.

Despite the challenges and limitations, the present study included aspects that added value and could have significant implications. This study is the first South African study to investigate best friend nominations and peer status amongst preschoolers. It is thus socially relevant in terms of the contributions it can offer in understanding the processes that underlie the development of preschool friendships in South Africa. The insights gained may help to design interventions aimed at promoting these. This may support preschoolers' holistic development, considering the important long-term developmental benefits of friendship (Denham & Brown, 2010; Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003; Halle & Darling-Churchill, 2016). The current study presented the beginning of a longitudinal study which will add significant

value to understandings of best friendships and peer status amongst preschoolers within a South African context.

Most international studies on friendship formation largely focus on homogenous groups of preschoolers thus disregarding the experiences of preschoolers with, for example, diverse ethnic backgrounds (Rubin et al., 2006; Howes et al., 2011). This study therefore adds value by including preschoolers from different ethnic backgrounds, that is, children from three major ethnic groups in the Western Cape, namely the White, Coloured and Black communities. The insights gained may promote a better understanding of friendships amongst South African preschool populations characterised by diversity.

The qualitative measures used to obtain the archival data, namely the child-friendly, individual semi-structured interviews and friendship nomination procedure, added an important subjective dimension to understanding early friendships. These honoured the young child's developmental capacity to report their own ideas, opinions and experiences (Eivers et al., 2012). Each interviewer spent approximately 90 minutes with an allocated preschooler to ensure that each preschooler's contributions to the topic were heard.

In terms of the results of the study, seven novel best friend nomination sub-themes were identified, namely *Shared specific play*, *General play*, *Dedicated play*, *Imitation and skills development*, *Out-of-school interaction*, *Familial influence* and *Similarity in skills*. As far as the research could ascertain, these sub-themes have not yet been identified as factors that influence preschoolers' nominations as a best friend in any previous international or South African studies. This study was also the first study to identify *Shared specific play* and *General play* as related but separate factors which influence preschoolers' nominations as a best friend.

Finally, feedback based on the study's results was given to the educational facilitators at the preprimary, preschool and daycare facility in Stellenbosch in the Western Cape Province

of South Africa. The aim of this was to allow educational facilitators insight into the best friend nominations and peer status amongst the preschoolers, as well as insight into those factors that may play a role in promoting friendships amongst them. The feedback was received well as the first of its kind.

7.3. Recommendations

After critically reviewing the current study, a few recommendations for future research can be made. Firstly, future studies could include preschoolers from other communities in South Africa to increase the applicability of the results in terms of quantifying responses. A larger sample size could also be used for this purpose. Secondly, future South African studies could include ethnicity or race as variables to examine whether there may be any differences in the best friend nomination themes and sub-themes based on these. This may be important to consider in light of South Africa's history of intergroup conflict stemming from Apartheid. Understandings may contribute to efforts designed to promote interracial friendships amongst a young South African population and facilitate interracial healing.

Lastly, a follow-up study on the stability of best friend nominations and peer status amongst preschoolers may be valuable. No South African studies have been performed on this topic, while international research has suggested that peer status seems to be largely stable throughout the preschool years (Denham & Holt, 1993; Walker, 2009), and that a low peer status may be associated with social isolation, which, if prolonged, may lead to psychological problems such as depression (Ladd, 2006). It might be important to gain insight into whether peer status may be stable amongst preschoolers in a South African context. This may inform an understanding of whether early prevention efforts may be required for a population of low peer status preschoolers who could be, according to international research such as Walker (2009), at risk for social isolation.

7.4. Concluding remarks

Due to the important long-term developmental benefits that friendships offer (Denham & Brown, 2010; Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003; Halle & Darling-Churchill, 2016), and the current gap in South African literature regarding best friendship and peer status amongst preschoolers, it is believed that the contribution the present study has made is important. This is the first study to investigate best friend nominations and peer status amongst a group of South African preschoolers. The insights gained may contribute to a better understanding of friendship amongst preschoolers within the South African context, and may help to design more effective interventions aimed at promoting friendship amongst them. This may support their holistic development. Moreover, interventions such as these may help mitigate peer rejection and protect a young South African population from future anxiety and depressive disorders associated with early rejection (Ladd, 2006). The current study revealed new knowledge into the factors that may influence preschoolers' nominations as a best friend, with seven of the total 14 best friend nomination sub-themes identified as novel. This added value to the study and may be valuable for future studies conducted in this regard.

The researcher hopes that the insights attained may assist educational facilitators in better understanding and encouraging friendships at the early preschool age. It is also hoped that these may contribute to the development of friendship interventions for preschoolers within the South African context. This manifests the potential to contribute meaningfully to the development and well-being of a future South African population.

REFERENCES

- Abdi, B. (2010). Gender differences in social skills, problem behaviours and academic competence of Iranian kindergarten children based on their parent and teacher ratings. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 5, 1175-1179.
doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.07.256
- Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley.
- Asher, S. R., & McDonald, K. L. (2009). The behavioral basis of acceptance, rejection, and perceived popularity. In K. H. Rubin, W. M. Bukowski, & B. Laursen (Eds.), *Handbook of peer interactions, relationships, and groups* (pp. 232-248). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Austin, M. C., & Thompson, G. G. (1948). Children's friendships: a study of the bases on which children select and reject their best friends. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 39, 101-116. doi:10.1037/h0062430
- Aydt, H., & Corsaro, W. (2003). Differences in children's construction of gender across culture: An interpretive approach. *American Behavioural Scientist*, 46(10), 1306-1325. Retrieved from
http://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/37192275/Aydt_Corsro.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAJ56TQJRTWSMTNPEA&Expires=1469261697&Signature=M1y02tD8lCXWf6YpSU978AvgjKg%3D&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DDifferences_in_Childrens_Construction_of.pdf
- Baldwin, M. W. (1992). Relational schema and the processing of social information. *Psychological Bulletin*, 112(3), 461-484. Retrieved from
<http://selfesteemgames.mcgill.ca/research/baldwnpsybull.pdf>

- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Barbarin, O. A., Richter, L., & De Wet, T. (2001). Exposure to violence, coping resources, and psychological adjustment of South African children. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 71(1), 16-25. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1866189/pdf/nihms-436.pdf>
- Barron, I. (2011). The shadows of difference: Ethnicity and young children's friendships. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 14, 655-673. doi:10.1080/13613324.2010.547848
- Bateman, A. (2012). Forging friendships: The use of collective pro-terms by preschool children. *Discourse Studies*, 14, 165-180. doi:10.1177/1461445611433630
- Belle, D. (1989). Gender differences in children's social networks and supports. In D. Belle (Ed.), *Children's social networks and social supports* (pp. 173-188). New York, NY: Wiley.
- Benozio, A., & Diesendruck, G. (2015). Parochialism in preschool boys' resource allocation. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 36(4), 256-264. Retrieved from http://ac.els-cdn.com.ez.sun.ac.za/S1090513814001615/1-s2.0-S1090513814001615-main.pdf?_tid=38ab6fba-93ad-11e6-adcc00000aab0f6b&acdnat=1476628467_638297f12ae4281897ea4507dce43515
- Berelson, B. (1952). *Content analysis in communication research*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Bertran, M. (2015). Factors that influence friendship choices in children under 3 in two schools: An approach towards child culture in formal settings in Barcelona. *Childhood*, 22, 187-200. doi:10.1177/0907568214528224

- Betts, L. R., Rotenberg, K. J., Trueman, M., & Stiller, J. (2012). Examining the components of children's peer liking as antecedents of school adjustment. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 30, 303-325. doi:10.1111/j.2044-835X.2011.02041.x
- Bigelow, B. J., & La Gaipa, J. J. (1980). The development of friendship values and choice. In H. C. Foot, A. J. Chapman, & J. R. Smith (Eds.), *Friendship and social relations in children*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley.
- Bless, C., Higson-Smith, C., & Sithole, S. L. (2013). *Fundamentals of social research methods an African perspective* (5th ed.). Cape Town, South Africa: Juta and Company Ltd.
- Bowlby, J. (1958). The nature of the child's tie to his mother. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 39(5), 350-373. Retrieved from http://expert-nurse.com/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/The_Nature_of_the_Childs_Tie_to_His_Mother_-_John_Bowlby.123173702.pdf
- Brendgen, M. (2012). Genetics and peer relations: A review. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 22(2), 419-437. Retrieved from https://www.ndsu.edu/fileadmin/psychology/Colloquium/Brendgen__2012_.pdf
- Brendgen, M., & Boivin, M. (2011). Genetic factors in children's peer relations. In K. H. Rubin, W. M. Bukowski, & B. Laursen (Eds.), *Handbook of peer interactions, relationships, and groups* (pp. 455-472). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Brumariu, L. E., & Kerns, K. A. (2010). Parent-child attachment and internalizing symptoms in childhood and adolescence: A review of empirical directions. *Development and*

- Psychopathology*, 22(1), 177-203. Retrieved from
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0954579409990344>
- Buss, A. H., & Plomin, R. (1984). *A temperament theory of personality development*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Byrne, D. (1971). *The attraction paradigm*. New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Cairns, R., Cairns, B., Neckerman, H., Gest, S., & Gariepy, J. L. (1988). Social networks and aggressive behavior: Peer support or peer rejection? *Developmental Psychology*, 24(6), 815-823. Retrieved from
<http://psycnet.apa.org.ez.sun.ac.za/journals/dev/24/6/815.pdf>
- Christakis, D. A., & Zimmerman, F. J. (2007). Violent television viewing during preschool is associated with antisocial behavior during school age. *Pediatrics*, 120, 993-999.
doi:10.1542/peds.2006-3244
- Cillessen, A. H., & Mayeux, L. (2004). From censure to reinforcement: Developmental changes in the association between aggression and social status. *Child Development*, 75, 147-163. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2004.00660.x
- Cillessen, A. H. N., & Mayeux, L. (2007). Expectations and perceptions at school transitions: The role of peer status and aggression. *Journal of School Psychology*, 45, 567-586.
doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2007.05.004
- Cleary, D. J., Ray, G. E., LoBello, S. G., & Zachar, P. (2002). Children's perceptions of close peer relationships: Quality, congruence, and meta-perceptions. *Child Study Journal*, 32(3), 179-192. Retrieved from
<http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ez.sun.ac.za/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=4&sid=bea7c41f-9598-4f94-a03c-d2d90f559fda%40sessionmgr112&hid=116>

- Colwell, M. J., & Lindsey, E. W. (2005). Preschool children's pretend and physical play and sex of play partner: Connections to peer competence. *Sex Roles*, 52, 497-509.
doi:10.1007/s11199-005-3716-8
- Conners-Burrow, N. A., McKelvey, L. M., & Fussel, J. J. (2011). Social outcomes associated with media viewing habits of low-income preschool children. *Early Education and Development*, 22, 256-273. doi:10.1080/10409289.2011.550844
- Coplan, R. J., Arbeau, K. A., & Armer, M. (2008). Don't fret, be supportive! Maternal characteristics linking child shyness to psychosocial and school adjustment in kindergarten. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 36, 359-371.
doi:10.1007/s1802-007-9183-7
- Corsaro, W. (1985). *Friendship and peer culture in the early years*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Daniels, D., & Moos, R. H. (1988). Exosystem influences on family and child functioning. In E. B. Goldsmith (Ed.), *Work and family: Theory, research, and applications* (pp. 113-133). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- De Jesus, A. Y., Ricciardelli, L. A., Frisen, A., Smolak, L., Yager, Z., Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, M., Diedrichs, P. C., Franko, D., & Gattario, K. H. (2015). Media internalization and conformity to traditional masculine norms in relation to body image concerns among men. *Eating Behaviors*, 18, 137-142. doi:10.1016/j.eatbeh.2015.04.004
- Denham, S. A. (2006). Social-emotional competence as support for school readiness: What is it and how do we assess it? *Early Education and Development*, 17(1), 57-89.
Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/225280377_Social-Emotional_Competence_as_Support_for_School_Readiness_What_Is_It_and_How_Do_We_Assess_It

Denham, S. A., & Brown, C. (2010). "Play nice with others": Social-emotional learning and academic success. *Early Education and Development*, 21, 652-680.

doi:10.1080/10409289.2010.497450

Denham, S. A., & Holt, R. W. (1993). Preschoolers' likability as cause or consequence of their social behavior. *Developmental Psychology*, 29(2), 271-275. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Susanne_Denham/publication/225280372_Preschoolers'_likability_as_cause_or_consequence_of_their_social_behavior/links/0912f4fd28a2b1bf77000000.pdf

Denham, S. A., McKinley, M., Couchoud, E. A., & Holt, R. (1990). Emotional and behavioral predictors of preschool peer ratings. *Child Development*, 61, 1145-1152. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.1990.tb02848.x

DeRosier, M. E., Kupersmidt, J. B., & Patterson, C. J. (1994). Children's academic and behavioral adjustment as a function of the chronicity and proximity of peer rejection. *Child Development*, 65, 1799-1813. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.1994.tb00850.x

Deutz, M. H. F., Lansu, T. A. M., & Cillessen, A. H. N. (2015). Children's observed interactions with best friends: Associations with friendship jealousy and satisfaction. *Social Development*, 24, 39-56. doi:10.1111/sode.12080

Doyle, A., Connolly, J., & Rivest, L. (1980). The effect of playmate familiarity on the social interactions of young children. *Child Development*, 51(1), 217-223. Retrieved from <https://www.mat.ulaval.ca/fileadmin/mat/documents/lrivest/Publications/01-DoyleConnollyRivest1980.pdf>

Drewry, D. L., & Clark, M. L. (1985). Factors important in the formation of preschoolers' friendships. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 146(1), 37-44. Retrieved from

<http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ez.sun.ac.za/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=63984635-5b47-40fd-92a4-c9b5ea457f20%40sessionmgr120&vid=1&hid=115>

Duncan, R. M., & Tarulli, D. (2003). Play as the leading activity of the preschool period: Insights from Vygotsky, Leont'ev, and Bakhtin. *Early Education and Development*, 14, 271-292. doi:10.1207/s15566935eed1403_2

Dunn, J., & Hughes, C. (2001). "I got some swords and you're dead!": Violent fantasy, antisocial behavior, friendship, and moral sensibility in young children. *Child Development*, 72, 491-505. doi:10.1111/1467-8624.00292

Edelman, S. (2009). *The relative contributions of physical attractiveness and prosocial behavior in preschool friendship choices*. (Unpublished honour's thesis). Wesleyan University, United States. Retrieved from http://wescholar.wesleyan.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1349&context=etd_hon_theses

Eggum-Wilkens, N. D., Fabes, R. A., Castle, S., Zhang, L., Hanish, L. D., & Martin, C. L. (2014). Playing with others: Head start children's peer play and relations with kindergarten and school competence. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 29(3), 345-356. Retrieved from <http://www.sciencedirect.com.ez.sun.ac.za/science/article/pii/S0885200614000362>

Eivers, A. R., Brendgen, M., Vitaro, F., & Borge, A. I. H. (2012). Concurrent and longitudinal links between children's and their friends' antisocial and prosocial behavior in preschool. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 27, 137-146. doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2011.05.001

Erikson, E. H. (1959). *Identity and the life cycle: Selected papers*. New York, NY: International Universities Press.

- Erwin, P. G. (1985). Similarity of attitudes and constructs in children's friendships. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 40, 470-485. doi:10.1016/0022-0965(85)90078-5
- Exenberger, S. (2003). Field study on the choice of friends in two multi-racial preschools (South Africa/London). *Anthropologischer Anzeiger*, 61(2), 233-243. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29542458>
- Farmer, T. W., & Farmer, E. M. Z. (1996). Social relationships of students with exceptionalities in mainstream classrooms: Social networks and homophily. *Exceptional Children*, 62(5), 431-450. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ez.sun.ac.za/docview/201088578?accountid=14049>
- Fawcett, C. A., & Markson, L. (2010). Similarity predicts liking in 3-year-old children. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 105, 345-358. doi:10.1016/j.jecp.2009.12.002
- Field, T., Miller, J., & Field, T. (1994). How well preschool children know their friends. *Early Childhood Development and Care*, 100, 101-109. doi:10.1080/0300443941000107
- Finchilescu, G., Tredoux, C., Mynhardt, J., Pillay, J., & Muianga, L. (2007). Accounting for lack of interracial mixing amongst South African university students. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 37, 720-737. doi:10.1177/008124630703700404
- Findlay, L. C., Girardi, A., & Coplan, R. J. (2006). Links between empathy, social behavior, and social understanding in early childhood. *Early Childhood Quarterly*, 21, 347-359. doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2006.07.009
- Fink, E., Begeer, S., Peterson, C. C., Slaughter, V., & De Rosnay, M. (2015). Friendlessness and theory of mind: A prospective longitudinal study. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 33, 1-17. doi:10.1111/bjdp.12060

- Fishbein, H. D., & Imai, S. (1993). Preschoolers select playmates on the basis of gender and race. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 14*, 303-316. doi:10.1016/0193-3973(93)90012-K
- Furman, W., & Bierman, K. L. (1983). Developmental changes in young children's conceptions of friendship. *Child Development, 54*, 549-556. doi:10.2307/1130041
- George, T. P., & Hartmann, D. P. (1996). Friendship networks of unpopular, average, and popular children. *Child Development, 67*, 2301-2316. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.1996.tb01858.x
- Gere, M. K., Villabo, M. A., Torgersen, S., & Kendall, P. C. (2012). Overprotective parenting and child anxiety: The role of co-occurring child behavior problems. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders, 26*, 642-649. doi:10.1016/j.janxdis.2012.04.003
- Gifford-Smith, M. E., & Brownell, C. A. (2003). Childhood peer relationships: Social acceptance, friendships, and peer networks. *Journal of School Psychology, 41*, 235-284. doi:10.1016/S0022-4405(03)00048-7
- Gmitrova, V., Podhajecka, M., & Gmitrov, J. (2009). Children's play preferences: Implications for the preschool education. *Early Child Development and Care, 179*, 339-351. doi:10.1080/03004430601101883
- Goldstein, S. E., Tisak, M. S., & Boxer, P. (2002). Preschoolers' normative and prescriptive judgments about relational and overt aggression. *Early Education and Development, 13*, 23-39. doi:10.1207/s15566935eed13012
- Goldstein, S., Field, T., & Healy, B. (1989). Concordance of play behaviour and physiology in preschool friends. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 10*, 337-351. doi:10.1016/0193-3973(89)90034-8

- Graham, J. A., & Cohen, R. (1997). Race and sex as factors in children's sociometric ratings and friendship choices. *Social Development*, 6(3), 355-372. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ez.sun.ac.za/doi/10.1111/j.1467-9507.1997.tb00111.x/epdf>
- Graham, J. A., Cohen, R., Zbikowski, S. M., & Secrist, M. E. (1998). A longitudinal investigation of race and sex as factors in children's classroom friendship choices. *Child Study Journal*, 28(4), 245-227. Retrieved from <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ez.sun.ac.za/ehost/detail/detail?vid=10&sid=ec61ba62-2fcd-49e9-89cc-8814f73e64a5%40sessionmgr4004&hid=4214&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl#db=aph&AN=1727260>
- Guo, J., Zhang, X., Wang, Y., & Xeromeritou, A. (2011). Humour among Chinese and Greek preschool children in relation to cognitive development. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 3(3), 153-170. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1053174.pdf>
- Guralnick, M. J., & Groom, J. M. (1988). Friendships of preschool children in mainstream playgroups. *Developmental Psychology*, 24(4), 595-604. Retrieved from https://depts.washington.edu/chdd/guralnick/pdfs/Guralnick_Grooms_Friendships_DP-1988.pdf
- Halle, T. G., & Darling-Churchill, K. E. (2016). Review of measures of social and emotional development. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 45, 1-11. doi:10.1016/j.appdev.2016.02.003
- Hallinan, M. T. (1980). Patterns of cliquing among youth. In H. Foot & A. T. Chapman (Eds.), *Friendship and social relations in children* (pp. 321-341). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

- Hartup, W. W. (1992). Friendships and their developmental significance. In H. McGarle (Ed.), *Childhood social development: Contemporary perspectives* (pp. 175-205). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Hawley, P. H., Johnson, S. E., Mize, J. A., & McNamara, K. A. (2007). Physical attractiveness in preschoolers: Relationships with power, status, aggression and social skills. *Journal of School Psychology, 45*, 499-521. doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2007.04.001
- Hay, D. F., & Cook, K. V. (2007). The transformation of prosocial behavior from infancy to childhood. In C. A. Brownell & C. B. Kopp (Eds.), *Socioemotional development in the toddler years: Transitions and transformations* (pp. 100-131). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Hayes, D., Gershman, T., & Bolin, L. (1980). Friends and enemies: Cognitive bases for preschool children's unilateral and reciprocal relationships. *Child Developmental, 51*, 66-82. doi:10.1111/1467-8624.ep12334527
- Howard, M. (2015). *Anxiety symptoms and behaviour inhibition in young South African children: A follow-up on parent and teacher reports* (Unpublished master's thesis). Stellenbosch University, South Africa. Retrieved from <http://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/96761>
- Howard, M., Muris, P., Loxton, H., & Wege, A. (2016). Anxiety-proneness, anxiety symptoms, and the roleplay of parental overprotection in young South African children. *Journal of Child and Family Psychology*. doi:10.1007/s10826-016-0545-z
- Howes, C., Guerra, A. W., Fuligni, A., Zucker, E., Lee, L., Obregon, N. B., & Spivak, A. (2011). Classroom dimensions predict early peer interaction when children are diverse in ethnicity, race, and home language. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 26*, 399-408. doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2011.02.004

- Howes, C., & Matheson, C. C. (1992). Sequences in the development of competent play with peers: Social and social pretend play. *Developmental Psychology*, 28, 961-974.
doi:10.1037/0012-1649.28.5.961
- Hoyte, F., Torr, J., & Degotardi, S. (2014). The language of friendship: Genre in the conversations of preschool children. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 12, 20-34.
doi:10.1177/1476718X13492941
- Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15, 1277-1288. doi:10.1177/1049732305276687
- Huyder, V., & Nilsen, E. (2012). A dyadic data analysis of executive functioning and children's socially competent behaviours. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 33, 197-208. doi:10.1016/j.appdev.2012.05.002
- Hymel, S., Vaillancourt, T., McDougall, P., & Renshaw, P. D. (2002). Peer acceptance and rejection in children. In P. K. Smith & C. H. Hardt (Eds.), *Blackwell handbook of childhood social development* (pp. 265-284). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.
- Illingworth, R. S., Nair, M. K. C., & Russel, P. (2013). *The development of the infant and the young child: Normal and abnormal*. New Delhi, India: Elsevier Health Sciences.
- Johnson, C., Ironsmith, M., Snow, C. W., & Poteat, M. (2000). Peer acceptance and social adjustment in preschool and kindergarten. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 27, 207-212. doi:10.1023/B:ECEJ.00000003356.30481.7a
- Katz, L., & Galbraith, J. (2006). Making the social visible within inclusive classrooms. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 21(1), 5-21. Retrieved from <http://www.rediscoveringschoolandcommunity.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/makingsocialvisibleKatz.pdf>

- Kehily, M. J., & Swann, J. (2003). *Children's cultural worlds*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons.
- Kowalski, K. (2003). The emergence of ethnic and racial attitudes in preschool-aged children. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 143*, 677-690. doi:10.1080/00224540309600424
- Krippendorff, K. (1989). Content analysis. In E. Barnouw, G. Gerbner, W. Schramm, T. L. Worth, & L. Gross (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of communication* (Vol. 1, pp. 403-407). New York, NY: Oxford University Press. Retrieved from http://repository.upenn.edu/asc_papers/226
- Ladd, G. W. (2006). Peer rejection, aggressive or withdrawn behavior, and psychological maladjustment from ages 5 to 12: An examination of four predictive models. *Child Development, 77*, 822-846. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2006.00905.x
- LaFontana, K. M., & Cillessen, A. H. N. (2002). Children's perceptions of popular and unpopular peers: A multimethod assessment. *Developmental Psychology, 38*, 635-647. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.38.5.635
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lindsey, E. W. (2002). Preschool children's friendships and peer acceptance: Links to social competence. *Child Study Journal, 32*(3), 145-155. Retrieved from http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Eric_Lindsey3/publication/237131504_Preschool_children's_friendships_and_peer_acceptance_Links_to_social_competence/links/0deec53a8c9e43b3bd000000.pdf
- Lindsey, E. W. (2014). Physical activity play and preschool children's peer acceptance: Distinctions between rough-and-tumble and exercise play. *Early Education and Development, 25*, 277-294. doi:10.1080/10409289.2014.890854

- Louw, D., & Louw, A. (2014). *Child and adolescent development* (2nd ed.). Bloemfontein, South Africa: Psychology Publications.
- Loxton, H. (2009). Monsters in the dark and other scary things: Preschoolers' self-reports. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 21, 47-60.
doi:10.2989/JCAMH.2009.21.1.7.809
- Loxton, H., & Hugo, M. (2014, September). Interacting for inclusivity and innovation: Community interaction symposium. *Preschoolers and Honours Psychology Students: Promoting Positive Interaction* conducted at Sustainability Institute, Lynedoch, Stellenbosch.
- Lund, R., Kusakabe, K., Panda, S. M., & Wang, Y. (2016). Building knowledge across transnational boundaries: Collaboration and friendship in research. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 20, 18-24. doi:10.1016/j.emospa.2016.05.002
- Maccoby, E. E. (1998). *The two sexes: Growing up apart, coming together*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mannarino, A. P. (1995). The development of children's friendships. In H. C. Foot, A. J. Chapman, & J. R. Smith (Eds.), *Friendship and social relations in children* (pp. 45-63). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Markovits, H., Benenson, J., & Dolenszky, E. (2001). Evidence that children and adolescents have internal working models of peer interactions that are gender differentiated. *Child Development*, 72, 879-886. doi:10.1111/1467-8624.00321
- Mayring, P. (2000). Qualitative content analysis. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 1(2). Retrieved from <http://217.160.35.246/fqs-texte/2-00/2-00mayring-e.pdf>
- McCabe, M. P., Ricciardelli, L. A., Stanford, J., Holt, K., Keegan, S., & Miller, L. (2007). Where is all the pressure coming from? Messages from mothers and teachers about

- preschool children's appearance, diet and exercise. *European Eating Disorders Review*, 15, 221-230. doi:10.1002/erv.717
- McDougall, P., & Hymel, S. (2007). Same-gender versus cross-gender friendship conceptions: Similar or different? *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 53, 347-380. doi:10.1353/mpq.2007.0018
- McGhee, P. E. (1979). *Humor: Its origin and development*. San Francisco, CA: W.H. Freeman and Co.
- McLeod, B. D., Wood, J. J., & Weisz, J. R. (2007). Examining the association between parenting and childhood anxiety: A meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 27, 155-172. doi:10.1016/j.cpr.2006.09.002
- McNamara, K. (2007). *The company they keep: Homophily in preschool friendship dyads* (Master's thesis). University of Kansas, United States. Retrieved from https://books.google.co.za/books?id=dsznCMXyKOAC&pg=PR4&lpg=PR4&dq=The+company+they+keep:+Homophily+in+preschool+friendship+dyads.&source=bl&ots=m4CeMiShLK&sig=tIYAkmK7VRerdTxfeV3nj6Ramsc&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEWj3wK7Mtv_PAhVhC8AKHU0EBE0Q6AEIzAB#v=onepage&q=The%20company%20they%20keep%3A%20Homophily%20in%20preschool%20friendship%20dyads.&f=false
- Mehta, C. M., & Strough, J. (2009). Sex segregation in friendships and normative contexts across the life span. *Developmental Review*, 29, 201-220. doi:10.1016/j.dr.2009.06.001
- Mendelson, M. J., Aboud, F. E., & Lanthier, R. P. (1994). Personality predictors of friendship and popularity in kindergarten. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 15, 413-435. doi:10.1016/0193-3973(94)90040-X

- Michiels, D., Grietens, H., Onghena, P., & Kuppens, S. (2008). Parent-child interactions and relational aggression in peer relationships. *Developmental Review*, 28, 522-540.
doi:10.1016/j.dr.2008.08.002
- Mikami, A. Y., Griggs, M. S., Lerner, M. D., Emeh, C. C., Reuland, M. M., Jack, A., & Anthony, M. R. (2013). A randomized trial of a classroom intervention to increase peers' social inclusion of children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 81, 100-112. doi:10.1037/a0029654
- Nelson, D. A., Burner, K. C., Coyne, S. M., Hart, C. H., & Robinson, C. C. (2016). Correlates of sociometric status in Russian preschoolers: Aggression, victimization, and sociability. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 94, 332-336.
doi:10.1016/j.paid.2016.01.054
- Nelson, G., & Prilleltensky, I. (2010). *Community psychology: In pursuit of liberation and well-being*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Newcomb, A., & Bagwell, C. (1995). Children's friendship relations: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(2), 306-347. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Andrew_Newcomb2/publication/247408582_Children's_Friendship_Relations_A_Meta-Analytic_Review/links/54da4f470cf233119bc2d1f9.pdf
- Newcomb, A. F., & Bagwell, C. L. (1996). The developmental significance of children's friendship relations. In W. Bukowski, W. Newcomb, & W. Hartup (Eds.), *The company they keep: Friendship in childhood and adolescence* (pp. 289-321). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

- Newcomb, A. F., Bukowski, W. M., & Pattee, L. (1993). Children's peer relations: A meta-analytic review of popular, rejected, neglected, controversial, and average sociometric status. *Psychological Bulletin*, 113, 99-128. doi:10.1037//0033-2909.113.1.99
- Nisbett, R. E., Gilovich, T. D., & Keltner, D. (2005). *Social psychology*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Ogelman, H. G., & Secer, Z. (2012). Investigating the choice of friendship 5-6 year olds make based on certain variables. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 47, 396-400. doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.06.670
- Parker, J. G., & Gottman, J. M. (1989). Social and emotional development in a relational context. In T. J. Berndt & G. W. Ladd (Eds.), *Peer relationships in child development* (pp. 95-131). Oxford, UK: John Wiley & Sons.
- Parkhurst, J., & Gottman, J. M. (1986). How young children get what they want. In J. M. Gottman & J. J. Parker (Eds.), *Conversations of friends: Speculations on affective development. Studies in emotion and social interaction* (pp. 315-345). Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Pellegrini, A. D., & Smith, P. K. (1998). Physical activity play: The nature and function of a neglected aspect of play. *Child Development*, 69, 577-598. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.1998.tb06226.x
- Perez, F. C., Santelices, P. A., Rivera, C. M., & Farkas, C. K. (2013). Preschoolers' attachment representations and maternal psychosocial characteristics in Santiago, Chile. *Mental Health and Prevention*, 1, 33-43. doi:10.1016/j.mhp.2013.10.002
- Pettigrew, T. F. (2008). Future directions for intergroup contact theory and research. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 32, 187-199. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2007.12.002

- Pettigrew, T. F., Tropp, L. R., Wagner, U., & Christ, O. (2011). Recent advances in intergroup contact theory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35, 271-280. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2011.03.001
- Piaget, J. (1965). *The moral judgment of the child*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Piaget, J. (1971). *Biology and knowledge*. Chicago, CA: University of Chicago Press.
- Piaget, J. (1972). *The child and reality: Problems of genetic psychology*. London, UK: Frederick Muller, Ltd.
- Poulin, F., & Chan, A. (2010). Friendship stability and change in childhood and adolescence. *Developmental Review*, 30, 257-272. doi:10.1016/j.dr.2009.01.001
- Quinn, M., & Hennessy, E. (2010). Peer relationships across the preschool to school transition. *Early Education and Development*, 21, 825-842. doi:10.1080/10409280903329013
- Ramani, G. B., Brownell, C. A., & Campbell, S. B. (2010). Positive and negative peer interaction in 3- and 4-year olds in relation to regulation and dysregulation. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology: Research and Theory on Human Development*, 171, 218-250. doi:10.1080/00221320903300353
- Ramazan, O., Ozdemir, A. A., & Beceren, B. O. (2012). Evaluation of play from private and public pre-school children's point of view. *Procedia- Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 46, 2852-2856. doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.05.576
- Ramsey, P. G., & Myers, L. C. (1990). Salience of race in young children's cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to social environments. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 11, 49-67. doi:10.1016/0193-3973(90)90031-E

- Rekalidou, G., & Petrogiannis, K. (2012). Criteria for selection and rejection of social relationships among children in urban and rural kindergartens in Greece. *International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education*, 40, 173-188.
doi:10.1080/03004279.2010.506193
- Repetti, R. L., & Wood, J. (1997). Effects of daily stress at work on mothers' interactions with preschoolers. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 11(1), 90-108. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Rena_Repetti/publication/232455461_Effects_of_daily_stress_at_work_on_Mothers'_interactions_with_preschoolers/links/0912f50e76d597232b000000.pdf
- Roopnarine, J. L., & Field, T. M. (1984). Play behaviors of friends and acquaintances in nursery school. In T. Field, J. Roopnarine, & M. Segal (Eds.), *Friendships in normal and handicapped children* (pp. 89-98). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Rubin, K. H., Bukowski, W., & Parker, J. (2006). Peer interactions, relationships and groups. In N. Eisenberg, W. Damon, & R. Lerner (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology: Social, emotional, and personality development* (2nd ed., Vol 3, pp. 571-645). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Rubin, K. H., Coplan, R. J., & Bowker, J. C. (2009). Social withdrawal in childhood. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60, 141-171. doi:10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163642
- Rubin, Z., & Sloman, J. (1984). How parents influence their children's friendships. In M. Lewis (Ed.), *Beyond the dyad* (pp. 115-140). New York, NY: Plenum.
- Sachkova, M. E. (2014). Middle status preschoolers in the system of peer relations. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 146, 296-301. doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.08.133
- Salvas, M., Vitaro, F., Brendgen, M., Dionne, G., Tremblay, R. E., & Boivin, M. (2014). Friendship conflict and the development of generalized physical aggression in the

- early school years: A genetically informed study of potential moderators. *Developmental Psychology*, 50, 1794-1807. doi:10.1037/a0036419
- Sanefuji, W. (2013). Similar physical appearance affects friendship selection in preschoolers. *Psychology*, 4, 8-13. doi:10.4236/psych.2013.46A2002
- Schaefer, D. R., Light, J. M., Fabes, R. A., Hanish, L. D., & Martin, C. L. (2010). Fundamental principles of network formation among preschool children. *Social Networks*, 32, 61-71. doi:10.1016/j.socnet.2009.04.003
- Schneider, B. H., Atkinson, L., & Tardif, C. (2001). Child-parent attachment and children's peer relations: A quantitative review. *Developmental Psychology*, 37, 86-100. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.37.1.86
- Sebanc, A. M. (2003). The friendship features of preschool children: Links with prosocial behavior and aggression. *Social Development*, 12, 249-268. doi:10.1111/1467-9507.00232
- Sebanc, A. M., Kearns, K. T., Hernandez, M. D., & Galvin, K. B. (2007). Predicting having a best friend in young children: Individual characteristics and friendship features. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 168, 81-95. doi:10.3200/GNTP.168.1.81-96.
- Segal, M. W. (1974). Alphabet and attraction: An unobtrusive measure of the effect of propinquity in a field setting. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 30, 654-657. doi:10.1037/h0037446
- Selman, R. (1980). *The growth of interpersonal understanding*. New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Semrud-Clikeman, M., & Glass, K. (2010). The relation of humor and child development: social, adaptive, and emotional aspects. *Journal of Child Neurology*, 25, 1248-1260. doi:10.1177/0883073810373144

- Shamir-Essakow, G., Ungerer, J. A., & Rapee, R. M. (2005). Attachment, behavioral inhibition, and anxiety in preschool children. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 33, 131-143. doi:10.1007/s-10802-005-1822-2
- Shin, N., Kim, M., Goetz, S., & Vaughn, B. E. (2014). Dyadic analyses of preschool-aged children's friendships: Convergence and differences between friendship classifications from peer sociometric data and teacher's reports. *Social Development*, 23, 178-195. doi:10.1111/sode.12043
- Sinclair, S., Dunn, E., & Lowery, B. (2005). The relationship between parental racial attitudes and children's implicit prejudice. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 41, 283-289. doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2004.06.003
- South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) & UNICEF. (2011). *South Africa's children: A review of equity and child rights*. Retrieved from http://www.sahrc.org.za/home/21/files/SA%20CHILDREN%2024%20MARCH%202011%20SAHRC%20_%20UNICEF%20REPORT.pdf
- Sroufe, L. A., Carlson, E., & Shulman, S. (1993). Individuals in relationships: Development from infancy through to adolescence. In D. C. Funder, R. D. Parke, C. T. Tomlinson-Keasey, & K. Widaman (Eds.), *Studying lives through time: Personality and development* (pp. 315-342). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Stanhope, L., Bell, R. Q., & Parker-Cohen, N. Y. (1987). Temperament and helping behavior in preschool children. *Developmental Psychology*, 23(3), 347-353. Retrieved from <http://psycnet.apa.org.ez.sun.ac.za/journals/dev/23/3/347.pdf>
- Statistics South Africa. (2015). *Statistical release: Mid-year population estimates*. Retrieved from <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0302/P03022015.pdf>

- Stevenson-Hinde, J., Shouldice, A., & Chicot, R. (2011). Maternal anxiety, behavioral inhibition, and other attachment. *Journal of Attachment and Human Development, 13*, 199-215. doi:10.1080/14616734.2011.562409
- Sullivan, H. S. (1953). *The interpersonal theory of psychiatry*. New York, NY: Norton.
- Tannock, M. T. (2011). Observing young children's rough and tumble play. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood, 36*(2), 13-20. Retrieved from <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ez.sun.ac.za/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=dd89201e-e745-4196-b758-8e42fb808109%40sessionmgr110&vid=1&hid=116>
- Underwood, M. K. (2007). Introduction to the special issue: Gender and children's friendships: Do girls' and boys' friendships constitute different peer cultures, and what are the trade-offs for development? *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 53*, 319-324. doi:10.1353/mpq.2007.0022
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (2007). UNICEF Web Site. Retrieved from: <http://www.unicef.org/crc/>
- Vreeke, L. J., Muris, P., Mayer, B., Huijding, J., & Rapee, R. M. (2013). Skittish, shielded, and scared: Relations among behavioral inhibition, overprotective parenting, and anxiety in native and non-native Dutch preschool children. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders, 27*, 703-710. doi:10.1016/j.janxdis.2013.09.006
- Vu, J. A., & Locke, J. J. (2014). Social network profiles of children in early elementary school classrooms. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 28*, 69-84. doi:10.1080/02568543.2013.850128
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1976). Play and its role in the mental development of the child. In J. S. Bruner, A. Jolly, & K. Sylva (Eds.), *Play - its role in development and evolution* (pp. 537-554). New York, NY: Basic Books.

- Walker, D. I., Curren, R., & Jones, C. (2016). Good friendships among children: A theoretical and empirical investigation. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 46, 286-309. doi:10.1111/jtsb.12100
- Walker, S. (2009). Sociometric stability and the behavioral correlates of peer acceptance in early childhood. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 170, 339-358.
doi:10.1080/00221320903218364
- Weber, R. P. (1990). *Basic content analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Wege, A. (2014). *The relationship between anxiety symptoms and behavioural inhibition in young South African children* (Unpublished master's thesis). Stellenbosch University, South Africa. Retrieved from <http://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/86283>
- Werebe, M. J. G., & Baudonniere, P. M. (1988). Friendship among preschool children. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 11, 291-304.
doi:10.1177/016502548801100301
- Williamson, R. A. (2015). Imitation during infancy and early childhood. *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioural Sciences* (2nd ed., pp. 621-627).
doi:10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.23165-6
- Yardley, L. (2008). Demonstrating validity in qualitative psychology. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (2nd ed., pp. 235-251). London, UK: Sage Publications.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Child Psychology 778: Honours Community Interaction Project

Questionnaire: Example of English version

1. Do you have a best friend?
2. Who is your best friend?

Would you like to make a drawing of your best friend? Here are some crayons and paper.

- 2.1 What is your best friend's name? (point to drawing)
- 2.2 Is your best friend at your school? (If not, elaborate)
- 2.3 Do you know how old your best friend is?
- 2.4 Is your best friend a girl or boy?
3. Why is X your best friend?
- 3.1 Why do you like X so much?
4. Do you have other friends?
5. How many other friends do you have?
6. What are their names?
7. Tell me more about your friends- what kinds of games do you like to play?
8. Story that you like best: Who told it? Where did you hear it?

Appendix B: Preliminary institutional permission

Preprimary, preschool and daycare facility letterhead

Cc Prof. Helene Loxton & Dr Hermann Swart
Dept. of Psychology
University of Stellenbosch
Private Bag X 1
MATIELAND
7602

Dear Ms Philippa Haw

Preliminary permission to conduct research at [REDACTED]

Thank you very much for the detailed information regarding the new proposed research you are planning to undertake at [REDACTED] that your supervisor, Prof. Helene Loxton, and co-supervisor, Dr Hermann Swart, presented to us during our meeting on 6 August 2015.

We understand that for your proposed research (Preliminary Title: *Best friend nominations and peer status amongst preschoolers: A South African study*):

You would like to have access to the archival data collected under supervision of Prof. Helene Loxton in 2015, as part of the Honours Community Interaction Project within the Child Psychology 778 Module.

We believe that we have been given enough information regarding the proposed research, and have gained enough understanding of what this project will entail.

We gladly give permission for you to access the archival data collected under Prof. Loxton's supervision, that you have requested. Furthermore, we undertake to assist in obtaining the appropriate retrospective permission from the parents of the children who will be involved, whenever the need arises, on condition that you first secure the necessary ethical clearance for this proposed research project from the Department of Psychology, as well as the Research Ethics Committee (Humanities) at Stellenbosch University.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Appendix C: Approval of research by ethics committee



Approval Notice

Stipulated documents/requirements

05-Nov-2015

Swart, Hermann H

Proposal #: SU-HSD-001725

Title: Peer friendships amongst pre-school children: Longitudinal stability and qualitative characteristics

Dear Dr. Hermann Swart,

Your **Stipulated documents/requirements** received on , was reviewed and has been **accepted**.

Please note the following information about your approved research proposal:

Proposal Approval Period: 02-Nov-2015 - 01-Nov-2016

General comments:

Please take note of the general Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter.

If the research deviates significantly from the undertaking that was made in the original application for research ethics clearance to the REC and/or alters the risk/benefit profile of the study, the researcher must undertake to notify the REC of these changes.

Please remember to use your **proposal number (SU-HSD-001725)** on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your research proposal.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

This committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research, established by the Declaration of Helsinki and the Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes 2015 (Department of Health). Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number REC-050411-032.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research.

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at 218089183.

Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham

REC Coordinator

Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)

Appendix D: Information letter to parents/guardians

Dear Parent / Guardian

REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH STUDY ON FRIENDSHIPS AMONGST PRESCHOOLERS

I, **Ms Philippa Haw**, am currently conducting research at the University of Stellenbosch with regard to friendships during early childhood (ages 4 – 6 years old), which will inform my proposed Masters' study entitled *Best friend nominations and peer status amongst preschoolers: A South African study*. There exists robust empirical evidence for the benefits of early childhood friendships, including long-lasting important social, mental, emotional and physical advantages, making these friendships imperative to study.

In addition, the research will inform a second proposed Masters' study which will be conducted by Ms Sarah Gordon entitled *Investigating the stability of peer friendships amongst preschool children: A longitudinal South African study*. Together, the two Masters' studies (Ms Philippa Haw's and Ms Sarah Gordon's) will comprise a broader study.

The broader study will focus on two aspects via the two Masters' studies to investigate the factors that determine preschoolers' best friend nominations and peer status, and to explore the stability of their friendship networks. The information gathered in the proposed research will make a valuable contribution to the current literature base on friendships of young children. Most importantly, it is the first study of its kind to be conducted within the South African context.

This letter is a friendly request to you as a parent or guardian of a child who falls between the age range of 4 to 6 years old, to participate in this research study by allowing myself (Ms Philippa Haw) access to archival data collected, under the supervision of Prof H. Loxton, earlier in the year as part of the Honours Community Interaction Project.

Participation of your child will be completely confidential and anonymity is assured. All information that will be used for research purposes will not be traceable to you or your child. The personal information required will only be used for administrative purposes. In the final results of this study the only aspects that will be reported on will be demographical data such as the age, gender and ethnicity of the child.

If you have any concerns about your child's behaviour during the course of the project, arrangements can be made for consultation with the supervisor, Prof Loxton, a registered Counselling Psychologist (hsl@sun.ac.za).

If you agree to have your child participate in this study, it will be appreciated if you would please complete the form entitled STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH, attached to this letter and return it in the enclosed envelope marked for the attention of Ms Sarah Gordon and Ms Philippa Haw.

For any further information regarding the research, you are welcome to contact the researchers or the supervisors. You can also contact the Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humaniora) at the University of Stellenbosch if you have further concerns or complaints that were not adequately addressed by the researcher.

You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for your own records.

Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely

Ms Philippa Haw

MA Psychology student

University of Stellenbosch

16551974@sun.ac.za

Supervisor: Prof H. Loxton

Department of Psychology

University of Stellenbosch

Private Bag x 1

Matieland

South Africa

7602

Co-supervisor: Dr H. Swart

Department of Psychology

University of Stellenbosch

Private Bag x 1

Matieland

South Africa

7602

DETAILS OF PARENT / GUARDIAN: INDICATION OF PARTICIPATION

Name of parent / guardian (full name in capital letters):

Mother / father / caregiver:

Name of your child:

Please mark the appropriate options:

I agree to participate in this research study.

I do not agree to participate in this research study.

Signature

Date:

Appendix E: Informed consent form for parents/guardians

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

FOR PARENTS / GUARDIANS

I, **Ms Philippa Haw**, ask you to participate in a research study conducted at the University of Stellenbosch with regard to friendships during early childhood (ages 4 – 6 years old). This research will inform my proposed Masters' study entitled *Best friend nominations and peer status amongst preschoolers: A South African study*.

The research will also inform a second proposed Masters' study to be conducted by Ms Sarah Gordon entitled *Investigating the stability of peer friendships amongst preschool children: A longitudinal South African study*.

Ms Sarah Gordon and I (Ms Philippa Haw) are BA Psychology (Hons) graduates, currently enrolled as MA (Psychology) students, at the Department of Psychology of Stellenbosch University. You were selected as a participant in this study given that (1) your child falls between the age group of 4 to 6 years old, and (2) attends the preprimary, preschool and daycare facility in Stellenbosch, where the research will be conducted.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the research study is to explore friendships in early childhood in a sample of young South African children (aged 4 – 6 years old) by means of individual interviews. The proposed study seeks to expand the current literature base on friendships in young children. Most importantly, it is the first study of its kind to be conducted within the South African context. The social relevance of this research is based on the future contributions this research can make in understanding the processes that underlie the complex development of friendships amongst preschool children. Furthermore, it serves as base line data for future projects and/or interventions.

2. PROCEDURES

Should you consent to participate in this research study, you will be asked to complete this form and **please return it to [REDACTED] before or on XX MONTH 2015.**

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

No physical risks or discomfort are likely to occur in the study.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

Firstly, the proposed study aims to fill a gap in South African literature with regard to friendship development in a sample of young South African children.

Secondly, one aspect of the proposed research (to be addressed by Ms Philippa Haw's proposed study) aims to identify and understand those factors that determine preschoolers' nominations as a best friend, and to assess whether there are any distinguishing characteristics among preschoolers receiving more peer nominations compared to those receiving fewer peer nominations. A study identifying the personal and situational factors that facilitate preschool friendships is thought to have substantial developmental value as friendships are suggested to play a significant role in individuals' cognitive, social and emotional development. To date, no studies have investigated these factors within a South African context. Findings of this research may support the development of interventions designed to cultivate in preschoolers those characteristics found to be attractive to peers, thus enhancing peer liking, promoting interaction, and supporting friendship development within a South African context. Furthermore, insight into the situational factors that predict peer liking may assist South African educators in being more knowledgeable of and promoting preschoolers' friendships.

Thirdly, a second aspect of the proposed research (to be addressed by Ms Sarah Gordon's proposed study) aims to understand the stability of peer friendships (social networks) amongst a sample of South African preschool children. Until recently, researchers have concentrated their efforts on exploring various characteristics of preschool friendships, including the number of friends a child has and the quality of these friendships. More often than not, these studies have not taken the temporal dimension of friendship into account. When this temporal dimension is taken into consideration, the transient nature of friendships emerge. The process of maintaining or terminating a friendship amongst preschoolers does not appear to be random. However, relatively little is known about the exact factors that explain the volatility or instability of friendship networks amongst children. This study is the first of its kind within the South African context and the findings from this study will make a valuable contribution to understanding and explaining friendships amongst preschool children.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Participants will not receive payment for participation in this study.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you or your child will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of the following: soft copies of the data will be stored on a password secured computer; hard copies of the data will be locked away into filing cabinets and only the researchers and the supervisors will have access to the data. The child will remain anonymous and his / her information will remain confidential. The only aspects that will be reported on will be demographic data such as the age, gender and ethnicity of the child, in the final reporting of the results.

Upon request, teachers and parents / guardians will be provided with specific feedback.

Should the research be published, participants' information will stay fully confidential and anonymous.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to participate in this study or not. If you volunteer to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. The researcher may withdraw you from the research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF RESEARCHER

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

Philippa Haw (**Researcher**)

OR

Sarah Gordon (**Researcher**)

Email: 16551974@sun.ac.za

Email: 18653758@sun.ac.za

Prof H. Loxton (**Supervisor**)

Dr. H. Swart (**Co-supervisor**)

Department of Psychology

Department of Psychology

University of Stellenbosch

University of Stellenbosch

Private Bag x 1

Private Bag x 1

Matieland

Matieland

South Africa

South Africa

7602

7602

Email: hsl@sun.ac.za

Email: hswart@sun.ac.za

9. RIGHTS OF PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, you are welcome to contact **Ms Maléne Fouché** (mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622) at the Division or Research Development, US.

**PLEASE TEAROFF THIS PAGE AND RETURN IN THE ENVELOPE WITH
THE INFORMATION LETTER**

Name of child: _____

Who completed the questionnaire: Mother / Father / Guardian?

Gender of guardian: Male / Female?

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

The information above was supplied to me by **Sarah Gordon** and **Philippa Haw** in English and I am in command of the language.

I, the participant, understand that if I need to ask questions, I need to contact the researchers, and my questions will be answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name and Surname

Participant (Parent / Guardian)

Signature of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER

I declare that I supplied the information given in this document to _____ [*name of the participant*].

Signature of Investigator

Date